



**15-DAY ZIMBABWE BIRDING AND WILDLIFE
SPECTACULAR**

With optional pre-tour to Mana Pools: Special birds, African mammals, and breathtaking scenery including Victoria Falls

1 - 15 FEBRUARY 2020



Blue Swallow (photo John Caddick) is one of our special targets on this trip.

Zimbabwe is an absolutely fabulous country – scenically wonderful, with very friendly people fluent in English and, surprisingly to many people, with a truly excellent infrastructure. The hundreds of miles of paved roads are in very good condition, and it is one of the few African countries of which you can see a great deal without the use of a 4x4. With an improving political leadership and the change to the US Dollar as the local currency, which has greatly improved the economy, the country is once again fast becoming a very popular destination to birders, and right now it is still possible to get very comfortable accommodation at comparatively low rates. During our 18-day tour (which includes the 3-day pre-tour) you'll see all the major habitats, sights, and birds of this wonderful country and end up with a very good bird list and loads of Africa's big and small mammals.

We begin with your international flight arriving in Harare, from where we take a charter flight to one of Africa's wildest game parks, Mana Pools. While this is one of the few game parks in Africa you can legally explore on foot, we do not advise this because of the presence of a host of dangerous animals. This incredible park is at the bottom of the breathtaking Zambezi River Valley (here, the Middle/Lower Zambezi, one of Africa's biggest rivers, is bounded by steep and immense escarpments on either side) and is full of excellent birds, including the localized **Lilian's Lovebird**, which is one of many targets we'll search for here. After three nights in this park we'll fly back to Harare.

For those who only have 15 days available and wish to start the tour now, not opting for the Mana Pools pre-tour, that is perfectly OK.

We then spend two nights in Harare itself. Harare has a very special position high on the Mashonaland Plateau and boasts brilliant wetland and Miombo birding. If good rains have fallen, December to February is the best time to find rare rallids such as **Streaky-breasted Flufftail**, **Striped Crake**, **Spotted Crake** and many others, along with a large variety of other birds such as the beautiful **Yellow-mantled Widow**, **African Grass Owl**, and a plethora of other sought-after birds around Zimbabwe's capital city. We also look for all the Miombo woodland endemics – Miombo woodland is a habitat found only in south-central Africa, so many of the birds we will see are endemic to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Angola and the DRC. We'll look for species such as **Miombo Rock Thrush**, **Miombo Tit**, **Cinnamon-breasted Tit**, **Boulder Chat** (near-endemic to Zimbabwe), **African Spotted Creeper**, and all the others.

We then head eastwards to the spectacular Eastern Highlands, where several species endemic to small parts of Mozambique and Zimbabwe lurk – including **Chirinda Apalis**, **Roberts' Warbler**, and more. **Swynnerton's Robin** is most easily found here, but does also extend northwards into Tanzania. We also look for **Blue Swallow**, **Striped Flufftail**, and other rare birds. The nearby eastern lowlands (Honde Valley and other sites), which we will also visit, have many birds more typical of the Mozambican coastal plain, and we will look for the rare and localized **Zambezi (Green) Indigobird** (best seen between January and March when in breeding plumage and singing from atop dead trees) along with other indigobirds, **Anchieta's Tchagra**, **Scarce Swift**, **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**, and the beautiful **Pink-throated Twinspot** among a very rich diversity of other birds. We'll spend several days birding the eastern highlands and lowlands of Zimbabwe – an absolutely idyllic area, which you'll be sad to leave.

We'll then head southwards to the Great Zimbabwe ruins, a fascinating place historically, but also a first class Miombo birding area, where we might see **Thick-billed Cuckoo** and (as always) so many others. Our next target is the fabulous rocky outcrops of Matobo National Park for two days, where we'll look for high concentration of raptors (including the highest density of

the magnificent **Verreaux's Eagle** on the planet), **Freckled Nightjar**, **Mackinder's** (the local race of Cape) **Eagle Owl** (with luck), the near-endemic **Boulder Chat**, and loads more (throughout Zimbabwe, there is a rich diversity of birds, wherever you go in the country). Then, nearing the end of our epic journey, we'll head to one of Africa's great game parks, Hwange National Park, where we'll see a host of new bird species that hopefully will include **Three-banded Courser**, **Bradfield's Hornbill**, and tons more, along with Africa's big (and small) mammals, in a massive park. We end the tour at the village of Victoria Falls, where we spend two nights in an extremely rich area for birds (expecting to add many new trip birds), while of course also looking at the great falls, before flying home from here (there are usually inexpensive flights from here to Johannesburg, from where you can connect homewards).

All in all, a trip of greatly contrasting scenery and habitats and relatively small driving distances on good roads.

Duration: 15 days + optional 3-day pre-tour
Limit: 4 – 9
Date: 1-15 February 2020
Depart: Harare
End: Victoria Falls

Price: US\$6673 to US\$8591 per person sharing for the 15-day tour, depending on group size, quality of accommodation, and other factors
Single supplement: US\$1770 when using better accommodation, less with basic accommodation
Price for the 3-day Mana Pools pre-tour: to be determined.

Price includes:
 Meals
 Accommodation
 All transport while on tour
 Guide

Price excludes:
 International flights
 Personal insurance
 Alcoholic beverages
 Gratuities
 Laundry service
 Personal expenses such as gifts