



## EASTERN ZIMBABWE AND CENTRAL MOZAMBIQUE

21 NOVEMBER – 5 DECEMBER 2019



**African Pitta** (photo Hugh Chittenden) is one of our special targets on this tour.

Zimbabwe and Mozambique combined show the highest diversity on the planet in terms of 30 different avian orders represented. They also share with coastal West Africa and Tanzania and Uganda the second-highest count of different families, only surpassed by northern India. This tour easily yields more than 400 species out of this incredible avian biodiversity. It also leads through varied and extremely beautiful scenery. Combined with excellent infrastructure in Zimbabwe and ever-improving conditions in Mozambique, this is a delightful and exciting tour for the avid world birder.

Beginning the tour in Harare on Zimbabwe's Mashonaland Plateau, we almost immediately start searching for a host of south-central African endemics, largely confined to miombo woodland and occurring in neither South nor East Africa. Many of these birds have this unique woodland type in their name, such as **Miombo Tit**, **Miombo Rock Thrush**, **Miombo Double-collared Sunbird**, and a lot of others. After a couple of days birding around Harare we head eastwards to the beautiful mountains straddling the border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique, en route hoping to find the unusual **Boulder Chat**, a species almost confined to Zimbabwe.

Here in the Eastern Highlands evergreen forests hold some very localized endemics such as **Chirinda Apalis** and **Roberts's Warbler**, as well as several birds that are more easily found here than in other countries, including **Swynnerton's Robin**. We also bird mountain grasslands for the Vulnerable (IUCN) **Blue Swallow**, and with luck we might find **Striped** or **Buff-spotted Flufftail**, **Scarce Swift**, and other birds that are fairly widespread but never easy to find.

After a few days in this idyllic mountain paradise we eventually cross the border into the steaming lowlands of Mozambique and head to the sprawling delta area of the Zambezi, one of Africa's greatest rivers. Here we hope to find the dazzling **African Pitta** displaying (we try our best to time the tour right for this). We also hope to find a rich array of other specials, such as **East Coast Akalat**, **White-chested Alethe**, **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo**, **Thick-billed Cuckoo**, **Lowland Tiny Greenbul**, **Mangrove Kingfisher**, and tons more.

The wide coastal plain is interrupted by Mount Gorongosa, where we stop for three days in search of **Green-headed Oriole**, **Blue Quail** (with luck), **Pallid Honeyguide** (difficult to get visuals on!), **Speckle-throated Woodpecker**, **Pel's Fishing Owl** (if we're lucky), **Red-winged Warbler**, and many others.

We end the tour in the port city of Beira. Nearby, at Rio Savane, we hope to find some excellent waterbirds (**Rufous-bellied Heron** can be surprisingly common here), but the number of waterbirds depends on how much rain has fallen.

All in all, this tour includes some of the richest parts of Zimbabwe and Mozambique for birds, encompassing an amazingly wide range of habitats. Starting the trip in Harare and ending it in Beira means that we can minimize driving time and maximize birding time. Given just 15 days, this is the route to take if you want to find the greatest number of tough and localized birds, along with an extremely respectable total bird list.

This tour can be combined with our pre-trip, **North-eastern South Africa 2019** or with our **Namibia, Okavango, and Victoria Falls 18-day Birding Adventure 2019**, which could be

preceded by our **16-day Subtropical South Africa Birding Adventure October 2019** and even, preceding that, with our **Western Cape South Africa 8-day Birding Adventure October 2019** for a stunning Southern African mega tour.

### Itinerary (15 days/14 nights)

#### Day 1. Arrival in Harare, Zimbabwe

Our international flights arrive in Harare, Zimbabwe (usually around midday), and we transfer to a guest house within this city's suburbs, where we spend two nights. The gardens sometimes host **Variable Sunbird**, barbets, and other dazzling species. If this is your first trip to Africa, prepare to be swamped with new birds, many of them brightly colored. In the afternoon, time permitting, we can head to nearby wetlands such as Monavale and Marlborough vleis. In years of good rainfall these wetlands support some rare crakes and other water-associated birds, but more usually we see a selection of relatively common species such as **Yellow-mantled Widowbird** and various others.

Overnight: Crake Cottage or similar, Harare

#### Day 2. Birding Harare's wetlands and woodlands

Today we spend much of the day visiting miombo woodland sites, where we hope to find **African Spotted Creeper**, **Cinnamon-breasted Tit**, **Whyte's Barbet**, **Miombo Rock Thrush**, **Miombo Blue-eared Starling**, **Boulder Chat**, and quite a big range of other species. Visits to sites with blooming flowers such as the Harare Botanical Gardens sometimes generate a lot of sunbirds, including **Miombo Double-collared Sunbird**, **White-bellied Sunbird**, and with luck **Western Violet-backed Sunbird** or **Copper Sunbird**.

Overnight: Crake Cottage or similar, Harare

#### Day 3. Transfer to Aberfoyle Lodge, woodland birding en route

Today we plan to leave early and embark on a half-day drive to the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe near the border with Mozambique, followed by a two-hour drive down a long winding road to the low altitude Honde Valley, which is contiguous with the Mozambican coastal plain. We have a lot of distance to cover today, but en route we'll be sure to spend some time birding around Goshu Park, just east of Marondera, for any miombo birds we might have missed near Harare.

Eventually we reach our lodge for the night, where feeders attract some strikingly beautiful birds such as **Red-throated Twinspot** and **Red-faced Crimsonwing**. Nearby riverine forests are home to **Pallid Honeyguide**, **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**, **White-eared Barbet**, **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon**, **African Broadbill**, **Square-tailed Drongo**, and as always a lot of others. **Ayres's Hawk-Eagle** is often seen in the area. A small colony of **Scarce Swift** can be accessed nearby, but this usually requires a walk of a kilometer or two (depending on the condition of the track above the lodge). Keeping an eye skywards might also generate this bird, along with **Mottled Swift** and a number of other swifts and swallows. **Lesser Seedcracker** is the most sought-after bird here in the Honde Valley, and while we'll allocate a good amount of time looking for it, this remains one of the toughest trip birds and it's certainly easy to miss.

This, the Honde Valley, is a scenic area with huge tea estates punctuated by some villages, subsistence farmland, and small patches of attractive riverine forest. The Mutarazi Falls can be

seen in the distance as they plummet an impressive 762 meters down from the Nyanga Highlands towering above this fertile valley.

Overnight: Aberfoyle Lodge, Honde Valley

#### **Day 4. Aberfoyle Lodge to Nyanga National Park**

After spending the morning birding the Honde Valley (continuing to look for the species mentioned for the previous day) we ascend to the mountains above Aberfoyle. These mountains, which reach 2,600 meters, are protected within the splendid Nyanga National Park. This park is one of the few places within the species' range where **Blue Swallow** is still common. If enough rain has fallen, drainage lines can support the mega-elusive **Striped Flufftail**. Here we also hope to get a head start on some forest birds, to take pressure off when we bird the Bvumba. And, as always, there are tons of more widespread species to look for, such as **Cape Grassbird**. A colony of **Mottled Swift** can be seen from our hotel. There is, of course, always a chance of finding something really tricky, such as a "Mackinder's" Eagle-Owl (a subspecies of **Cape Eagle-Owl**).

Overnight: Pine Tree Inn, Nyanga area

#### **Day 5. Birding Nyanga National Park and the Bvumba Highlands**

After birding during the morning at Nyanga National Park, we head via Mutare to the Bvumba highlands, a couple of hours to the south. We will spend three nights here, birding around Mutare and in the evergreen forests of the Bvumba Highlands.

Overnight: Seldomseen Cottages, Bvumba Highlands

#### **Days 6 – 7. Birding the Bvumba Highlands area**

These forests are phenomenally productive for some of the region's star specials, including the likes of **Swynnerton's Robin**, **Orange Ground Thrush**, **Chirinda Apalis**, **Roberts's Warbler**, **Barratt's Warbler** (what a skulker!), **White-tailed Crested Flycatcher**, **Stripe-cheeked Greenbul**, **Livingstone's Turaco**, **Buff-spotted Flufftail** (widespread but relatively easy to actually get visuals on here – although still needing a very large amount of luck!), and many others. Sometimes **Gurney's Sugarbird** can be found here, away from its main population in South Africa, Lesotho, and Swaziland. We can also look for any temperate forest or miombo woodland birds we may have missed previously. The miombo woodlands of this particular area are very good for **Cabanis's Bunting**, **Miombo Tit**, **Miombo Double-collared Sunbird**, and many others.

Overnight: Seldomseen Cottages, Bvumba Highlands

#### **Day 8. Bvumba Highlands to M'Phingwe Camp, Mozambique**

In the early morning we will be birding around Seldomseen. We depart after breakfast for Mozambique, entering Mozambique through the Forbes Border Post, Mutare. Then we travel via Chimoio and Inchope to M'Phingwe Camp near Caia. This is the Zambezi delta area, which is another absolute treasure-chest for special birds – including a whole new suite of species we won't yet have seen. While we spend a lot of time traveling today, we are still likely to add several new birds to our growing list.

Overnight: M'Phingwe Camp, Catapu

### Days 9 – 10. Birding M’Phingwe Camp and surrounds

Two days are spent birding in woodlands and lowland forests, among them the renowned Coutada 12. We spend a lot of our time birding along a track that gives access to some pristine lowland forest, which is where the bulk of the special birds we’re after are found. These include **African Pitta**, **Lowland Tiny Greenbul**, **Mangrove Kingfisher** (in this area away from mangroves), **East Coast Akalat**, **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo** and other cuckoos, three helmetshrike species including **Chestnut-fronted Helmetshrike** (all three sometimes mixing in the same flock!), **Plain-backed Sunbird**, **White-chested Alethe**, **Southern Banded Snake Eagle**, and more. Finding all these specials, many of them real skulkers, takes time. So, we have two full days here, searching for the birds mentioned above. We can also visit the bridge over the Zambezi River at Caia for a completely different habitat, which is sure to augment our bird list a fair amount.

Overnight: M’Phingwe Camp, Catapu

### Day 11. M’Phingwe Camp to Gorongosa National Park

After early morning birding around Caia we travel via Gorongosa town to our rustic but well-positioned “lodge”, Gorongosa Aventuras camp at the entrance to Gorongosa National Park. After our arrival we may have time for some afternoon birding in the expansive grounds of Gorongosa Aventuras.

Overnight: Gorongosa Aventuras

### Day 12. Mount Gorongosa and birding the Gorongosa area

Today we embark on a real adventure, driving part-way and walking the rest of the way up the slopes of Mount Gorongosa. This is an isolated massif rising majestically from the otherwise flat Mozambican coastal plain. The mountainside contains some evergreen forest, which hosts **Green-headed Oriole** (an endemic subspecies), **Pallid Honeyguide**, and a lot of other good birds. En route to this forest patch we hope to stop in the scrub for a host of exciting possibilities, which include the likes of **Marsh Tchagra**, **Blue Quail**, **Moustached Grass Warbler**, **Magpie Mannikin**, **Lesser Seedcracker** (if we missed it at Aberfoyle), and **Pale Batis**. We return to camp around lunchtime. The rest of the day is spent birding in miombo woodland around Gorongosa Aventuras. A night drive can, with a little luck, generate three **Nightjar** species, **Fiery-necked**, **Square-tailed**, and the miraculous **Pennant-winged**, and other night birds.

Overnight: Gorongosa Aventuras

### Day 13. Birding the Gorongosa area

We spend the day around the lodge, where several species lurk that are tough to find anywhere. These include **Red-winged Warbler**, **Speckle-throated Woodpecker**, **Pel’s Fishing Owl** (with luck in some years we find roost sites), **Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher**, and various **Cuckoos**, including the scarce **Thick-billed**.

Overnight: Gorongosa Aventuras

### Day 14. Gorongosa to Beira

Early morning departure for Beira. We arrive mid morning and spend the rest of the day birding wetlands and grasslands around Beira. **Rufous-bellied Heron**, **African Marsh Harrier**, and various other birds are usually present in good numbers. **Locust Finch**, **Blue Quail**, **Short-tailed Pipit**, **Cuckoo-finch**, **Eurasian Bittern**, **Senegal Lapwing**, and others are typically less

predictable, and their presence depends on various factors such as the amount of water around. The declining **Great Snipe** is occasionally seen.

Overnight: Hotel in or near Beira

### **Day 15. Birding Beira, departure**

For part of the morning we bird around Rio Savane and Beira. Then we head to the Beira airport for our international flights home.

Hopefully we will have cleaned up on all the specials (whether localized, or whether more widespread but easier to find here than elsewhere, such as African Pitta). We certainly will have birded a very rich variety of habitats from the mountains to the steaming lowlands, so we have a very good bird list by the end of the trip.

*Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.*

<b>Duration:</b>	15 days
<b>Group Size:</b>	2 – 9 (we usually limit the group size to 8, rarely 9)
<b>Date:</b>	21 November – 5 December 2019
<b>Depart:</b>	Harare, Zimbabwe
<b>End:</b>	Beira, Mozambique
<b>Price:</b>	US\$5281 per person sharing assuming 6-9 participants US\$6206 per person sharing assuming 4-5 participants US\$7187 per person sharing assuming 2-3 participants
<b>Single supplement:</b>	US\$791

#### **Price includes:**

Meals  
Accommodation  
Guiding fees  
All transport while on tour

#### **Price excludes:**

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