



MALAWI: 15-DAY BIRDING ADVENTURE

1 - 15 DECEMBER 2019



The Endangered (IUCN) **Spotted Ground Thrush** (photo Ian Merrill) is one of our targets on this trip.

Malawi, a country in southeast Africa rarely visited by tourists, is an amazing destination for birders. Its numerous national parks are brimming with avian riches, and beautiful Lake Malawi adds a different slate of birds to the enjoyment. Our tour will visit three of the national parks, Lengwe, Liwonde, and Nyika, and two surprisingly bird-rich nature reserves. There is also much of the African mammalian and reptilian wildlife repeatedly interrupting the rewarding birding. The tour will conclude at Lake Malawi, one of the most scenic and picturesque of the East African Rift Valley lakes.

Itinerary (15 days, 14 nights)

Day 1. Lilongwe

You arrive at Lilongwe International Airport and transfer to the Kumbali Country Lodge. A walk into the forest area on a nearby farm in the afternoon is available for those who wish to join. Our main target birds will include **African Finfoot, White-backed Night Heron, Schalow's Turaco, Half-collared Kingfisher, African Broadbill, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Mountain Wagtail, and Pied Mannikin.**

Overnight: Kumbali Country Lodge (bed and breakfast only)

Day 2. Lengwe National Park

After a fairly early start we'll drive southwards along the Mozambican border, stopping for birding along the way. We drive through Blantyre and then down into the Lower Shire Valley with splendid views of the vast plains below. Lengwe National Park is an 887km² wilderness of dense thickets and mixed open woodland. Our overnight chalets are comfortable and spacious, all with en suite facilities. A wide variety of typical woodland species occur here, and our trip list should grow considerably. Apart from Lengwe's special birds (see tomorrow), a good variety of more widespread species should include **Western Banded Snake Eagle, Brown-headed Parrot, Crowned Hornbill, African Golden Oriole, African Paradise Flycatcher, Retz's Helmetshrike, Miombo Blue-eared Starling, Variable Sunbird, African Yellow White-eye, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, and Red-headed Weaver.**

Overnight: Nyala Lodge, Lengwe National Park

Day 3. Lengwe National Park

We will spend a full day birding in the thickets and woodlands of Lengwe National Park. Lengwe's special birds are found in the dense, low-lying thickets and include **Crested Guineafowl, Tambourine Dove, Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo, Böhm's Bee-eater, Green-backed Woodpecker, Square-tailed Drongo, Cabanis's and Grey-olive Greenbuls, Eastern Nicator, Rudd's Apalis, Livingstone's Flycatcher, Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher, Woodward's Batis, and Grey Sunbird.**

Overnight: Nyala Lodge, Lengwe National Park

Day 4. Thyolo

It's a three-hour drive to Thyolo, back through Blantyre and Limbe. On arrival at Satemwa Tea Estate we check into the delightful, old, colonial house on the estate, with the afternoon free to explore this rich habitat. We will spend the remainder of the day walking in the forest. Thyolo Mountain (1462 m) is the most prominent feature of the Shire Highlands. The mountain extends

north and south in long ridges, dropping sharply to the Shire River in the west and undulating gently down to the Thuchila and Ruo Rivers in the east. Isolated pockets of a once-extensive forest mosaic remain but are becoming increasingly threatened by illegal felling. We will be staying in the well-positioned colonial house of a big tea estate. For those who wish, a visit to the working tea factory is possible. A number of highly-range-restricted species occur here, and our targets will include **Green Barbet**, the near-endemic **Thyolo Alethe**, and **White-winged Apalis**. Other montane forest specials could include **Green-headed Oriole**, **Spotted Ground Thrush**, **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon**, **Moustached Tinkerbird**, **Evergreen Forest Warbler**, **Black-headed Apalis**, **Bar-tailed Trogon**, **White-eared Barbet**, **Bertram's Weaver**, **Green Twinspot**, and **African Citril**.

Overnight: Huntington House, Satemwa Tea Estate

Day 5. Zomba

After an early-morning walk we return to the house for a delicious breakfast and then depart for the two-hour drive to Zomba. A visit to the local market is interesting, after which we ascend the plateau to Ku Chawe Inn. This hotel is beautifully positioned on the edge of the escarpment with superb views of the plains below. Walks around the forest here will deliver species like **White-starred Robin**, **Schalow's Turaco**, a variety of greenbuls including **Placid Greenbul**, **Red-faced Crimsonwing**, **Green Twinspot**, various warblers, and perhaps the rare **White-winged Apalis** and **Black-headed Apalis**.

Overnight: Ku Chawe Inn, Zomba

Day 6. Liwonde National Park

After breakfast we continue northwards and enter Liwonde National Park, a 548km² wilderness of swamps, grasslands, and mopane woodlands in the Upper Shire Valley. We will be staying at Mvuu Camp, a tented camp set beautifully overlooking the Shire River. The afternoon game activity should add many waterbirds to the list, possibly including specials like **White-backed Night Heron**, **White-backed Duck**, **African Pygmy Goose**, **Lesser Jacana**, **White-crowned Lapwing**, **Long-toed Lapwing**, **Gull-billed Tern**, **African Skimmer**, **Black Coucal**, and **Southern Brown-throated Weaver**.

Overnight Mvuu Camp, Liwonde National Park

Day 7. Liwonde National Park

A day of river safaris, drives, and bush walks should reveal a good diversity of wood and riverine forest birds. Our main target birds will be **Böhm's Bee-eater**, **Brown-breasted Barbet**, **Lilian's Lovebird**, and **Livingstone's Flycatcher**, with other specials including **Bat Hawk**, **African Cuckoo-Hawk**, **Red-necked Falcon**, **Dickinson's Kestrel**, **Red-necked Spurfowl**, **Green Malkoha**, **African Barred Owlet**, **Pel's Fishing Owl**, **Mottled Spinetail**, **Eastern Nicator**, **Collared Palm Thrush**, **Meves's Starling**, and **Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah**. Among these will be more typical woodland species such as **Brown-headed Parrot**, **Purple-crested Turaco**, **Green-capped Eremomela**, **Pale Flycatcher**, **Southern Black Flycatcher**, **Black-crowned Tchagra**, **Tropical Boubou**, **Grey-headed Bushshrike**, and **White-crested Helmetshrike**.

Overnight: Mvuu Camp, Liwonde National Park

Day 8 – 9. Dzalanyama Forest Reserve

From Liwonde it's a drive up the Golomoti escarpment and Dedza through Lilongwe, then an hour and a half to Dzalanyama Forest Reserve. We should arrive at Dzalanyama in the mid afternoon. The days here are spent exploring various locations to spot the specialties of the area. We will spend our time here birding the rich miombo woodlands. Some of the many target birds will include **Pale-billed Hornbill, Whyte's Barbet, Miombo Pied Barbet, Stierling's Woodpecker, Miombo Scrub Robin, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Rufous-bellied Tit, White-tailed Blue Flycatcher, Souza's Shrike, Anchieta's Sunbird, Shelley's Sunbird**, and the rare **Olive-headed Weaver**. Along with these should be a number of typical Miombo birds such as **Green-backed Honeybird, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Spotted Creeper, Miombo Tit, Retz's Helmetshrike, Wood Pipit, Miombo Rock Thrush, Southern Hyliota, Red-throated Twinspot, Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Black-eared Seedeater, and Cabanis's Bunting**.

Overnight Dzalanyama Forest Lodge

Day 10. Vwaza Marsh Game Reserve

An early-morning drive northwards over the Viphya Plateau through Mzuzu will bring us to Vwaza Marsh Game Reserve. Our arrival at Vwaza will be in the late afternoon. Viphya Forest will hopefully produce a number of exciting species and endemics, like **White-tailed Blue Flycatcher, Miombo Rock Thrush, African Spotted Creeper, Trilling Cisticola, Brown Parisoma, Rufous-bellied Tit, Miombo Tit, Anchieta's Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, and Reichard's Seedeater**.

Overnight Tented Camp, Vwaza Marsh Game Reserve

Day 11 - 12. Nyika National Park

We will take a three-hour birding walk before returning for breakfast, then we continue to Nyika National Park. A short stop will be made to search a riparian forest at Thazima Gate (our entrance to Nyika National Park) for the highly-localized **Black-backed Barbet**. We will have two days birding the mountain grasslands and forests of the Nyika Plateau. We will overnight at Chelinda Camp in chalets with commanding views of the surrounding grasslands. Nyika National Park and the Viphya Plateau have a host of birds that are scarce or absent elsewhere in Malawi. Some of our target birds will be **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, Red-winged Francolin, Denham's Bustard, Ruwenzori Nightjar, Angola Swallow, African Pipit, Black-colored Cisticola, Churring Cisticola, Mountain Yellow Warbler, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler, and Montane Widowbird**. Aside from these we could also find **Shelley's Francolin, Common Quail, Blue Swallow, Wattled Crane, Augur Buzzard, Malachite Sunbird**, and a number of common grassland birds. Some of the montane evergreen forests near the Zambian border and the forests on the eastern rim of the plateau will yield a bewildering array of new birds, hopefully including **Dusky Turtle Dove, Waller's Starling, Slender-billed and Red-winged Starlings, Olive-flanked Ground Robin, White-chested Alethe, Brown-headed Apalis, Chestnut-throated Apalis, African Hill Babbler, Sharpe's Greenbul, Green-headed Sunbird, Baglafaecht Weaver**, and a number of more widespread forest specialists such as **Schalow's Turaco, Bar-tailed Trogon, Moustached Tinkerbird, Fülleborn's Boubou, Cape Batis, White-starred Robin, Mountain Greenbul, Orange Ground Thrush, Evergreen Forest Warbler, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher**, and others. The eastern forests have several birds not found elsewhere on Nyika, namely **Mountain Illadopsis, Sharpe's Akalat, and Oriole Finch**.

Overnight: Chelinda Camp, Nyika National Park

Day 13. Chintheche

After an early morning's birding walk and breakfast we pack our things and head off to the shores of Lake Malawi. We arrive in the early afternoon at Makuzi Beach, south of Chintheche. Our comfortable chalets are on the beach overlooking the lake. Remnants of lowland evergreen forest en route support **East Coast Akalat, Red-capped Robin-Chat, Green-backed Woodpecker, Black Saw-wing, Grey-olive Greenbul, Purple-banded Sunbird, Eastern Nicator, African Broadbill, and Olive Sunbird**. If time permits we will also search for **Lemon-breasted Canary** on the floodplain.

Overnight: Makuzi Beach Lodge, Makuzi

Day 14. Chintheche

This day is at leisure and for exploring the surroundings.

Overnight: Makuzi Beach Lodge, Makuzi

Day 15. Transfer to Lilongwe and departure

We transfer for four hours along the lakeshore to Lilongwe in time to catch your return flights.

Duration:	15 days
Group size:	6 – 7
Date:	1-15 December 2019
Start:	Lilongwe
End:	Lilongwe
Price:	US\$7129 per person assuming 6 - 7 people
Single supplement:	US\$1275

Price includes:

Transport
All accommodation
Non-motorized water sports
Park entrance fees
Activities at the lake.

Price excludes:

Drinks
Optional motorized water sports (waterskiing and scuba diving)
International flights
Medical insurance
Personal expenses such as gifts

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.