


Birding Ecotours

SOUTH CENTRAL AFRICA: ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

14 AUGUST - 9 SEPTEMBER 2021



Chaplin's Barbet (photo Niall Perrins) is one of our targets on this trip.

It is surprising that Zambia and Malawi are not bombarded by birders! Probably they are just not particularly well-marketed, charismatic, and popular countries for birding tours. But this is certainly not because they're not exactly as amazing as any of their more popular neighbors in East and Southern Africa. Their avifauna is incredible for advanced and novice birders alike; both countries are teeming with huge numbers of amazing birds that will delight beginners as well as experienced birders, including loads of regional (if not country) endemics, and even a number of "Congolese-Zambian" specials on the northern border of Zambia. In addition, these countries are not only teeming with birds but also with loads of big animals, amazing sights, and everything else that makes Africa such a brilliant continent to travel in. On this tour we will visit a large number of areas in both countries proclaimed by BirdLife International as Important Bird Areas (IBAs), as well as several wonderful national parks – a route that hopefully will allow us to watch the majority of these exciting avian riches.

Itinerary (27 days/26 nights)

Day 1. Livingstone

Arrival day at Harry Mwanga Nkumbula International Airport in Livingstone, Zambia. Depending on the time of arrival we will head out straight away in search of some of our target birds near to our lodge. We'll look for **Miombo Pied Barbet**, **Miombo Rock Thrush**, and **Racket-tailed Roller**.

Overnight: Natural Mystic Lodge, Livingstone

Day 2. Livingstone

We will head out at the crack of dawn to the Machile area, our first Zambian IBA, for **Black-cheeked Lovebird**. Here we will also have a go at **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse** and **Black Coucal**. After leaving the Machile area we'll head for the Zambezi floodplains, where we hope to find **Slaty Egret**. We'll also have a night drive in search of **Southern White-faced Owl**.

Overnight: Natural Mystic Lodge, Livingstone

Day 3. Choma – Nkanga River Conservation Area

We have the morning available if we need to mop up on missed birds. After breakfast we head to Choma and into another Zambian IBA, the Nkanga River Conservation Area. We should arrive in time for a good afternoon session of birding. Our targets here include **Miombo Pied Barbet**, **Shelley's Francolin**, **Miombo Tit**, and **Miombo Double-collared Sunbird**, as well as **Shelley's Sunbird**.

Overnight: Masuku Lodge, Choma

Day 4. Choma – Nkanga River Conservation Area

Our main target today is **Chaplin's Barbet** as well as the aforementioned species. At night we will drive around in the hope of finding **Bronze-winged Courser**.

Overnight: Masuku Lodge, Choma

Day 5. Lusaka – Lochinvar National Park

We will leave Choma fairly early and head for Lochinvar National Park (part of the Kafue Flats IBA), where we hope to find the likes of **Slaty Egret** and **Allen's Gallinule** (easier in summer) and also some of the Miombo targets on the way into the park.

Overnight: Fringilla Lodge, Chisamba

Day 6. Chimfunshi

Today we will have a fairly long drive to Chimfunshi, another Zambian IBA, where there is a host of miombo targets for us. But, most importantly, we will try and find the elusive **Sharp-tailed Starling** here. Other possibilities include **Laura's Woodland Warbler**, **Brown-headed Apalis**, **Pale-billed Hornbill**, **Whyte's Barbet**, **Miombo Scrub Robin**, **Böhm's Flycatcher**, and **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Weaver**.

Overnight: Chingola area

Day 7. Mwinilunga

After morning birding at Chimfunshi we will drive to Mwinilunga in the extreme northwest of Zambia near its borders with Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, birding along the way. We might get to Mwinilunga in time for some late-afternoon birding.

Overnight: Mwinilunga

Day 8. Mwinilunga

First we will stop at Chitunta Plain, where we will look for **Grimwood's** and **Fülleborn's Longclaws** as well as **Angolan Lark** and **Black-and-rufous Swallow**. We will also search for **Bocage's Weaver** along the stream.

Overnight: Mwinilunga

Day 9. Mwinilunga

Today we'll concentrate on the local forest specials, looking for some of the regular miombo targets we might still need, in addition to **Brown-headed Apalis**, **Bamboo Warbler**, **Bannerman's Sunbird**, **Margaret's Batis**, **Anchieta's Barbet**, and **Western Bronze-naped Pigeon**.

Overnight: Mwinilunga

Day 10. Chimfunshi

Driving back to Chimfunshi, this will essentially be an overnight stop. We might also have some time to clean up on birds we might have missed the first night.

Overnight: Chingola area

Day 11. Forest Inn

We'll leave fairly early. Just in case we dipped on **Margaret's Batis** we might visit a back-up site called Imanda (a Zambian IBA), where this species is usually easily located. From here we'll head to Forest Inn near the town of Mkushi. If we arrive in time we'll bird the lodge's grounds, where **Miombo Scrub Robin** is common, and we often also find **Böhm's Flycatcher**, **Black-eared Seed-eater**, **Black-backed Barbet**, and occasionally **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Weaver** here.

Overnight: Forest Inn, Mkushi

Day 12. Forest Inn

We will have an early morning departure for a very productive and pristine patch of miombo woodland, where we might find **Böhm's Bee-eater** along a stream before entering the woodland. Here we'll search for **Black-necked Eremomela**, **Bar-winged Weaver**, **Anchieta's Sunbird**, **Miombo Double-collared Sunbird**, **Pale-billed Hornbill**, and **Orange-winged Pytilia**.

Overnight: Forest Inn, Mkushi

Day 13. Kapishya Hot Springs Lodge

From Forest Inn we head to Kapishya Hot Springs Lodge. On the way we will pass the famous Africa House (Shiwa N'gandu); an optional tour of the old mansion can be arranged by request. We'll visit the bird-rich miombo surrounding the dam, where we'll again have time to clean up on some of the birds we might have missed. The short grass on the dam shore is good for **Fülleborn's Longclaw**, and the patches of miombo should hold **Anchieta's Barbet**, **Miombo Tit**, and **Black-eared Seedeater**.

Overnight: Kapishya Hot Springs Lodge, Mpika

Day 14. Kapishya Hot Springs

Kapishya Hot Springs is a delightful birding spot, and its gardens attract an array of sunbirds. We'll hope for the rather elusive **Shelley's Sunbird**, while **Miombo Double-collared Sunbird** should be much easier, though. This is also a top spot for **Laura's Woodland Warbler**.

Overnight: Kapishya Hot Springs Lodge, Mpika

Day 15. Transfer to Malawi

We'll depart very early as we head toward Malawi today. This will be mainly a travel day. We'll use a little-known border post at the northern border of Malawi, which has recently been upgraded to a fully-fledged border post, but the details are still a bit sketchy. That said, the track, about 80 km to the border, can take up to four hours if it's in a bad state, and then we will also have a lengthy drive in Malawi. We should arrive at our first destination in Malawi in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Mathunkha Safari Lodge, Rumphi

Day 16. Uzumara Forest Reserve

Today we will be birding in the Uzumara Forest Reserve, a Malawian IBA. Our main target here, and never an easy bird, is **Sharpe's Akalat** – we'll also try for it in Nyika National Park, but it's probably even tougher there. **Olive-flanked Ground Robin** is another important find here, and fortunately slightly easier than its aforementioned cousin. Other targets include **Black-lored Cisticola**, **Chapin's Apalis**, **Bertram's Weaver**, and **Yellow-browed Seedeater**.

Overnight: Mathunkha Safari Lodge, Rumphi

Day 17. Nyika National Park

We will have a full morning at Uzumara before heading into Nyika National Park, also a Malawian IBA, where we will stay for two nights, allowing us a full day in the park. Once again, as in Misuku, we hope to be able to lay our eyes on the ever-skulking **Striped Flufftail**. **Black-backed Barbet** can sometimes be seen in the afro-montane forest patches here, and we'll also search for both **Chapin's** and **Brown-headed Apalises** and hope for another chance at **Black-**

lored Cisticola – albeit by this time we should have it under the belt already, allowing us to concentrate on finding **Churring Cisticola**.

Overnight: Nyika National Park

Day 18. Nyika National Park

Today we have a full day in this stunning part of the world. We'll bird both forest, bracken, and grassland, and perhaps some miombo as well. **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk** is not uncommon and is often seen hunting, even around pine plantations. Again we'll search for **Sharpe's Akalat** if we failed to locate it in Uzumara, and the same applies to **Olive-flanked Ground Robin**. **Scarlet-tufted Sunbird** is high on our list of priorities today, as are **Yellow-browed Seedeater** and **Bertram's Weaver**. **Montane Widowbird** shouldn't be too difficult to locate, but unfortunately we will have to be satisfied seeing them in their rather drab non-breeding dress.

Overnight: Nyika National Park

Day 19. Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve

Depending on our success in finding the key Nyika species we could spend the morning birding Nyika once more and then head out to Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve, another Malawian IBA, where we will enter a totally different landscape, dominated by miombo woodland. Our two main target species here are **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Weaver** and **Babbling Starling**, joined by a host of species we might already have on our list or that might still have eluded us, such as **Miombo Pied Barbet**, **Racket-tailed Roller**, **Southern White-faced Owl**, **Black Coucal**, **Bronze-winged Courser**, **Böhm's Flycatcher**, and of course the hard-to-locate **Shelley's Sunbird**. We will bird the area just north of the entrance to Vwaza Marsh.

Overnight: Nyika National Park

Day 20. South Viphya Forest Reserve

Today we head for yet another Malawian IBA, South Viphya Forest Reserve on the South Viphya Plateau, the second-largest montane complex in Malawi. Here we will keep a lookout for **Whyte's Barbet**, **Moustached Tinkerbird**, **Yellow-browed Seedeater**, **Fülleborn's Boubou**, **Chapin's Apalis**, **Yellow-streaked Greenbul**, **East Coast Akalat**, and **Bar-tailed Trogon**. With luck we might even encounter **Striped Flufftail**. A special treat will await aficionados of Nectariniidae today: The beautiful garden of our lodge is home to **Green-headed**, **Grey**, **Miombo Double-collared**, **Shelley's**, **Purple-banded**, **White-bellied**, and **Variable Sunbirds**.

Overnight: Luwawa Forest Lodge

Day 21. Dzalanyama Forest Reserve

We can do some more birding in the early morning at Luwawa. After breakfast we make our way south to Dzalanyama Forest Reserve, a great birding spot, another IBA, and home to several of our targets. We should find star birds such as **Pale-billed Hornbill**, **Whyte's Barbet**, **Miombo Pied Barbet**, **Miombo Tit**, **Chapin's Apalis**, **Miombo Scrub Robin**, **Miombo Rock Thrush**, **Böhm's Flycatcher**, **Black-eared Seedeater**, **Anchieta's Barbet**, and **Shelley's Sunbird**.

Overnight: Dzalanyama Forest Lodge

Day 22. Dzalanyama Forest Reserve

Today's focus will be on some of the more important birds of Dzalanyama Forest Reserve, which include some real beauties. The likes of **Boulder Chat**, **Lesser Seedcracker**, **Olive-headed Weaver**, **Stierling's Woodpecker**, and **Reichard's Seedeater** should whet even the most ardent birder's appetite.

Overnight: Dzalanyama Forest Lodge

Day 23. Zomba Plateau

We'll spend the morning birding Dzalanyama Forest Reserve for some of the previously-mentioned species. We also have an outside chance of **Blue Quail**, but these will require a concerted effort to flush. After some good birding we'll head for the Zomba Plateau. We don't have many targets here, but the ones we do have are rather tricky, and we'll concentrate our efforts on finding them. We could also keep an eye out for birds such as **Lesser Seedcracker** that occur here.

Overnight: Zomba Plateau

Day 24. Zomba Plateau

After an early start we'll be looking for our targets. First and foremost, and probably the most difficult, is **Tyolo Alethe**, a bird under a lot of pressure from illegal logging and the subsequent disappearance of its preferred habitat. Another "must-find" is **White-winged Apalis**, and if we find these two star birds we'll have reason to celebrate. Other notable birds we may encounter include Malawi's only true endemic, **Yellow-throated Apalis**, as well as **Black-headed Apalis**, **Olive-headed Greenbul**, **Yellow-throated Woodland** and **Evergreen Forest Warblers**, and **Forest Double-collared Sunbird**.

Overnight: Zomba Plateau.

Day 25. Liwonde National Park

We might have to spend the morning birding the surrounds, depending on our success with the Zomba targets. Then a short drive will see us to the gates of yet another Malawian IBA, Liwonde National Park, hopefully in time for some afternoon birding.

Overnight: Liwonde National Park

Day 26. Liwonde National Park

We'll have a full day birding Liwonde National Park, with emphasis on finding **Böhm's Bee-eater**, **Lilian's Lovebird**, **Reichenow's Woodpecker**, and **Livingstone's Flycatcher**. We'll also be on the lookout once more for **Bronze-winged Courser**, **Southern White-faced Owl**, and **Racket-tailed Roller**.

Overnight: Liwonde National Park

Day 27. Departure

Today we'll drive to Lilongwe International Airport for our international flights out. Depending on the time of the flights we might also be able to squeeze in some last-minute birding.

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.

Duration: 27 days
Group size: 5 – 6
Date: 14 August – 9 September 2021
Start: Livingstone, Zambia
End: Lilongwe, Malawi

Price: US\$15,357 per person sharing for 6 participants
US\$16,536 per person sharing for 5 participants
Single supplement: US\$1,507

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Guiding fees and local guide
All transport while on tour
Tolls
Entrance fees to parks as per itinerary
Bottled water

Price excludes:

International flights
Zambian and Malawian visa (for most nationalities payable at entrance in US dollars)
Medical evacuation insurance
Drinks other than bottled water
Tips
Laundry service
Personal expenses such as gifts