

Birding Ecotours

A stylized white owl with large eyes, perched on a horizontal line, set against a green diamond-shaped background.

BIRDING TOUR ANGOLA: AFRICA'S BEST-KEPT BIRDING SECRET

18 JUNE - 6 JULY 2024



*The spectacular and highly localized **Braun's Bushshrike** is one of the ultimate birds to be found in Angola.*

Since Angola's three-decade-long civil war ended in 2002, the country has enjoyed peace and stability, along with a massive surge in infrastructural advancements, opening the country up to tourism (much to the delight of birders who want to see its 1,000+ bird species including 15 superb endemics and a suite of other localized birds). During the initial post-war years, Angola was deemed to be a country only for 'hard-core' tourists, and even the few birding tours available were typically overland camping adventures. Fortunately, this has changed somewhat in the last few years, and while a sense of adventure is still required, an ever-improving road network makes this country easier to traverse, and with suitable accommodation options available along the entire route, **this tour has no overland camping.**

Angola has a massive diversity of species, nearly 1000 species occurring within its borders, of which thirteen are true endemic species, while countless other near-endemics and highly localized species feature prominently. This is all a testament to the many habitats within the country and ultimately the fantastic birding Angola possesses, making it without a doubt one of the finest birding countries in Africa and a destination not to be missed by any world birder.



Black-necked Eremomela will be searched for in miombo woodland.

This comprehensive tour takes us through the western parts of the country and to all the key birding areas. Beginning in the capital, Luanda, our first birding foray sees us visiting the dry woodlands of the Kissama National Park before venturing north into the exciting and seldom-visited scarp forests, more consistent with Equatorial Africa. We then gradually begin working our way south, first taking in the spectacular Kalandula Falls and their exciting swamp forests before calling in at the famous Kumbira Forest, outside of Gabela – a town which has three endemic species named after it. We will seek out many endemic species here before transferring even further south to the highest mountain in the country, Mount Moco (2,620 meters or 8,600 feet). We then journey to

the coast and the town of Benguela, where we get our first sampling of the many more iconic "Namibian" specials (which are now also accessible in Angola), before reaching our end point in Lubango, from where we explore the spectacular Tundavala escarpment and the dry coastal plain to the Namibe Province.

This well-designed route gives us a chance for all the country's endemics, near-endemics, and specials, including such rare and poorly known species as the spectacular **Braun's, Gabela, and Monteiro's Bushshrikes, Gabela Helmetshrike, White-headed Robin-Chat, Swierstra's and Grey-striped Francolins, Red-crested Turaco, White-fronted Wattle-eye, Pulitzer's Longbill, Angolan Slaty Flycatcher, Angolan Cave Chat, Gabela Akalat, Bocage's Sunbird, Bocage's Weaver, and Angolan Waxbill**. Many other more widespread species are also best sought within Angola and include the likes of **Finsch's Francolin, Anchieta's Barbet, Margaret's Batis, Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye, Angolan Lark, Black-and-rufous and Red-throated Cliff Swallows, Tit Hylia, Black-necked Eremomela, Black-collared Bulbul, Pale-olive and Falkenstein's Greenbuls, Bubbling Cisticola, Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush, Bates's and Bannerman's Sunbirds, Woodhouse's Antpecker, Landana Firefinch, and Dusky Twinspot**. Almost all of the Namibian 'specials' feature on the route as well, including **Hartlaub's Spurfowl, Rüppell's Korhaan, Monteiro's Hornbill, Rüppell's Parrot, White-tailed Shrike, Benguela Long-billed Lark, Rockrunner, Carp's Tit, Bare-cheeked Babbler and Cinderella Waxbill**. On top of these mouthwatering species we should tally up an impressive species list and expect our total to exceed 500 species. We look forward to welcoming you on our Complete Angolan Birding Tour as we venture into one of Africa's best-kept secrets!

This tour can be combined with our São Tomé and Príncipe birding tour immediately after, as there are direct flights from Luanda to these endemic-rich islands

Itinerary (19 days/18 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Luanda

Today is your arrival day, and you can arrive at your leisure into the Angolan capital, Luanda. We will transfer to the comfortable Kwanza Lodge, south of the city, where we will spend the night. The tour formally begins in the afternoon/evening with a group dinner.

Overnight: Kwanza Lodge, Luanda

Day 2. Transfer from Kwanza Lodge to Muxima

We will spend our first morning in the country birding around the grounds of the lodge, along with the nearby Kwanza River mouth, where we will primarily search for **Royal and Damara Terns and Mangrove Sunbird**. Many other species are possible, and we will likely also find our first waterbirds, including **Woolly-necked Stork, Grey Heron, Little Egret, and Water Thick-knee**. **Palm-nut Vultures** are regular around the lodge, and we will also be sure to keep an eye out for **Blue-breasted Kingfisher**, among the more common kingfisher species, such as **Woodland,**

Malachite, and **Pied Kingfishers**. The sought-after **Olive Bee-eater**, along with **Little Bee-eater**, hawk insects over the river, while the surrounding scrub holds the near-endemic **Bubbling Cisticola** along with **Spectacled Weaver**. While searching for the unique **Mangrove Sunbird** we are also likely to come across other sunbird species, including **Purple-banded**, **Collared**, and **Scarlet-chested**. **Long-legged Pipit** also frequents the more open areas. We will also journey north toward the extensive mudflats of the Mussulo bay, arguably the country's best wader/shorebird-watching site. Stately **Greater Flamingos** patrol the shallows here, with raptors such as **African Fish Eagle** and **Western Osprey** also regularly occurring here. The exposed tidal mudflats, however, will form our primary focal point, and we will search for a variety of species, including **Grey**, **Kittlitz's**, and **White-fronted Plovers**, **Whimbrel**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, and **Sanderling**. **Collared Pratincole** frequents the drier regions away from the mudflats, while tern/gull roosts will be searched for **Kelp** and **Grey-headed Gulls** along with other tern species such as **Caspian** and **Sandwich Terns**. The surrounding scrub plays host to species such as **Red-faced Mousebird**, **Angolan Swallow**, **Bubbling Cisticola**, **Northern Grey-headed Sparrow**, and **Red-headed Finch**. Following our time here we will transfer to the south-eastern corner of the Kissama National Park to the Muxima area, where we will spend two nights. and begin our hunt for the first of the country's true endemics. The vegetation will change to a much drier, open, baobab-dominated woodland, and the area hosts some more localized species for Angola, although widespread elsewhere in southern Africa, such as **Purple Roller**, **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Southern White-crowned Shrike**, and **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver**, among others. We will likely arrive in this area later in the day and begin birding in earnest the following morning.

Overnight: Muxima



Gabela Helmetshrike is one of the prized birds occurring in Kissama National Park.

Day 3. Birding Muxima and Kissama National Park.

We have a full day to explore this area and will take a few specific tracks, venturing deeper into the area. We again see a slight habitat change, heading into a lush area, crisscrossed with dry riverbeds and dense thickets. It is these areas that hold the local major specials and where we will spend the bulk of our time. The dry riverbeds are home to large, mature, acacia-type trees, and we will search these areas for the highly prized and localized endemics, **Monteiro's Bushshrike** and **Gabela Helmetshrike**, along with the more widespread, near-endemic **Red-backed Mousebird**. The denser thickets host one of the other endemic targets of the area, **White-fronted Wattle-eye**, and also support the endemic **Hartet's Camaroptera** and the near-endemic **Pale-olive Greenbul**, although these latter two are more widespread and thus also possible elsewhere on the trip. This area also gives us our best chance for the difficult-to-see, endemic **Grey-striped Francolin**, and we will be sure to keep a beady eye on the tracks watching out for this scarce gamebird among its more common cousin, **Red-necked Spurfowl**. Also best sought in this area is the near-endemic **Golden-backed Bishop**, and although we will not be seeing these birds in their breeding plumage, their unique structure and plumage make them easy to identify.



Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush has a beautiful song and is widespread in coastal Angola.

Aside from the above species, which will be our major targets, this area is rich in birdlife, and we're likely to come across many other species. Possible raptors include **Palm-nut Vulture**, **Brown Snake Eagle**, **Bateleur**, **Lizard Buzzard**, **African Goshawk**, and **Yellow-billed Kite**, while we will also be sure to watch the skies for the sought-after **Böhm's** and **Mottled Spinetails**, along with **Mosque Swallow**, all of which breed in the many baobabs strung throughout the area. **Emerald-spotted Wood Dove** occurs alongside **Namaqua Dove**, and some of the larger species in the area include **Grey Go-away-bird**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, **Green Wood Hoopoe**, and **Crowned Hornbill**. Colorful **Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters** frequent the tree tops, while a variety of

Woodpeckers, including **Bearded**, **Cardinal**, and **Golden-tailed**, prefer the larger trees, and **Brown-hooded** and **Striped Kingfishers** sit quietly in the mid-strata. The larger riverine trees also host many other passerines, including **Orange-breasted Bushshrike**, **Brubru**, **White-crested Helmetshrike**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Yellow-bellied Greenbul**, **Long-billed Crombec**, **Arrow-marked Babbler**, **Violet-backed Starling**, and **Grey Tit-Flycatcher**, while the denser thickets play host to other sought-after species such as **Angolan Batis**, **Swamp Boubou**, **Green Crombec**, **Forest Scrub Robin**, **Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush**, and **Dark-backed Weaver**.

Overnight: Muxima

Day 4. Transfer from Muxima to Uige

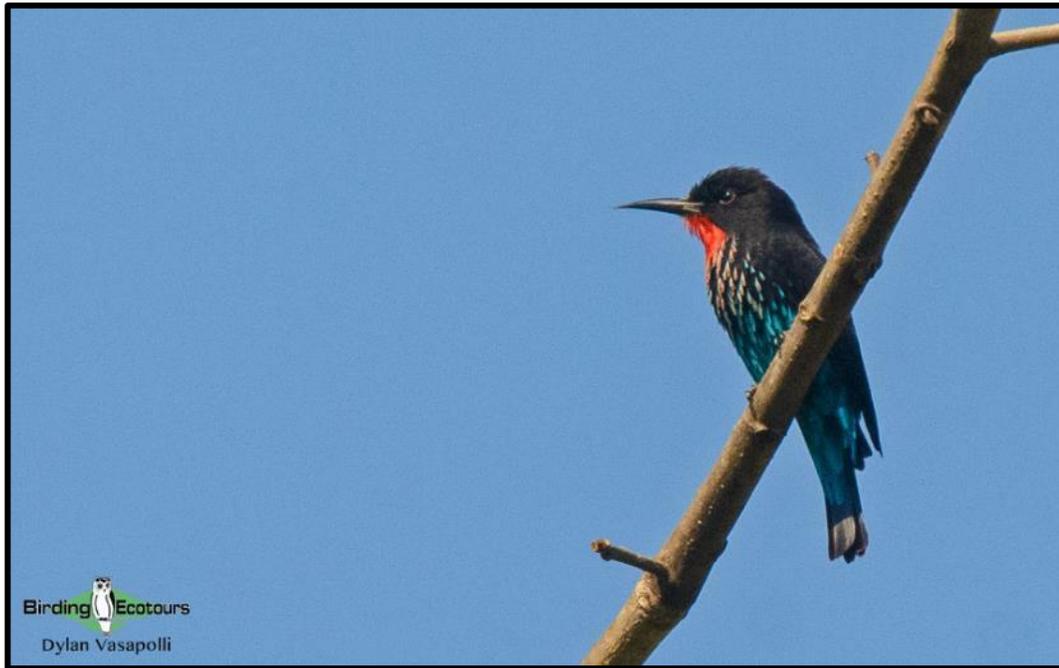
We have the morning available to further explore the Muxima area for any possible species we have yet to find before pressing onward to today's ultimate destination at Uige. Our route will see us head through the northern section of the Kissama National Park and arguably one of the finest baobab forests in the world – a truly spectacular sight to behold, before arriving in the Catete area, where we will explore the floodplains associated with the Kwanza River for some wetland birding. Here we will try for **White-faced Whistling Duck**, **Yellow-billed Stork**, **African Openbill**, **Squacco**, **Striated**, **Rufous-bellied**, and **Purple Herons**, **Great Egret**, **Black Crake**, **Allen's Gallinule**, and **African** and **Lesser Jacanas**, among others. The open lands surrounding the floodplains host **Blue-spotted Wood Dove**, **Diederik Cuckoo**, **Banded Martin**, and **Village** and **Slender-billed Weavers**. From here we will complete our long journey to Uige, with a possible birding stop near the small village of Quibaxe, for our first taste of some of the northern scarp forest birds (see under Days 5-6 for an account of species in the area).

Overnight: Uige

Days 5 - 6. Birding Quitexe and surroundings and the Damengola Forest

The northern scarp forest of Angola holds arguably some of the most exciting birds in the country, and, although the area doesn't host many endemics, it is the chance of finding rare and somewhat unknown species within these relatively unexplored forests that is one of the major drawing cards to the area. Our main focus will be on the Damengola Forest and surroundings, which gives us access to a far more extensive section of these northern scarp forests. A great many species are to be sought in the area, including more Guinea-based species along with more central African species. Foremost of our targets here will be the beautiful, but incredibly localized, endemic **Braun's Bushshrike**. This rare and poorly known species is one of Angola's most sought-after birds and will have the bulk of our time and effort being dedicated toward seeing it. Some of the other more important specials to be sought include such rare and infrequently seen species as **African Piculet**, **Tit Hylia**, and **White-collared Oliveback** (nearly 1000 kilometers outside of its known range) although difficult, **Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher**, **Yellow Longbill**, and **Black-bellied Seedcracker**. While exploring these forests the mournful hoots of **Afep** and **Western Bronze-naped Pigeons** are never far away; however, as is customary, it takes some time and patience to track these species down. **Blue-throated Rollers** perch in the open above the canopy, and the massive **Black-casqued Hornbills** flap noisily between perches, while **Red-fronted Parrots** commute overhead in the mornings and evenings and **Yellow-crested Woodpeckers** drum from the massive trees. The calls of **Grey-headed** and **White-breasted Nigritas** ring out

regularly, while large and boisterous **Guinea Turacos** bound in the tree tops. Not to be outdone, the massive **Great Blue Turaco** occurs in the area as well and never fails to impress. Angola's national bird, the endemic **Red-crested Turaco**, occurs as well but is uncommon here and best searched for elsewhere on the trip.



*The stunning **Black Bee-eater** occurs in the northern scarp forests!*

Black Bee-eater flits overhead, and this spectacular bird is fortunately a regular sight in the area. However, the highly prized **Chocolate-backed Kingfisher** is more difficult to locate, but both will be targeted. **Piping** and **African Pied Hornbills** are often heard before being seen, as is true with the many **Barbets** occurring here, such as **Naked-faced**, the strange **Bristle-nosed**, **Hairy-breasted**, and **Yellow-billed**, along with **Speckled** and **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds**. A number of **Starlings** occur in these forests, and we'll be on the lookout for **Splendid**, **Chestnut-winged**, and **Narrow-tailed**, all regularly attending fruiting trees. **Sunbirds** are also many and diverse, with **Little Green**, **Grey-chinned**, **Collared**, **Green-headed**, **Blue-throated Brown**, **Olive**, **Olive-bellied**, and the beautiful **Superb** all occurring. Other species to be sought here include **Tambourine Dove**, **African Emerald Cuckoo**, **Blue Malkoha**, **African Pygmy Kingfisher**, **Buff-spotted Woodpecker**, **Angolan Batis**, **Chestnut Wattle-eye**, **Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher**, **Bocage's Bushshrike**, **Tropical Boubou**, **Pink-footed Puffback**, **Mackinnon's Shrike**, **Black-winged Oriole**, **Rufous-vented Paradise Flycatcher**, **Petit's** and **Purple-throated Cuckooshrikes**, **Velvet-mantled Drongo**, **Yellow-throated Nicator**, **Swamp Palm Bulbul**, **Simple**, **Slender-billed**, **Little**, **Plain**, and **Yellow-whiskered Greenbuls**, **Red-tailed Bristlebill**, **Black-throated Apalis**, **Banded** and **White-chinned Prinias**, **Yellow-browed Camaroptera**, **Brown Illadopsis**, **Dusky-blue Flycatcher**, **Fraser's Rufous Thrush**, **Forest Scrub Robin**, **Grey-throated Tit-Flycatcher**, **Vieillot's Black** and **Yellow-mantled Weavers**, and **Crested** and **Red-headed Malimbés**. Rolling grassy hills surround these scarp forests and

play host to many other interesting species, top of them being the unique **Black-collared Bulbul**. Not to be forgotten are species such as **Northern Fiscal**, **Brown-backed Scrub Robin**, **Chattering Cisticola**, **Moustached Grass Warbler**, **African Yellow Warbler**, **Black-winged Red Bishop**, **Yellow-mantled Widowbird**, **Red-headed Quelea**, **Orange-cheeked Waxbill**, **Black-and-white Mannikin**, **Landana Firefinch**, and the snazzy **Brown Twinspot**. We will also be on the lookout for some of the rarer and more uncommon species, including **Yellow-throated Cuckoo**, **Red-rumped Tinkerbird**, **African Shrike-flycatcher**, **Forest Swallow**, **Scaly-breasted Illadopsis**, **Pale-fronted Nigrita**, and the poorly known **Woodhouse's Antpecker**.

Overnight: Uige



*The strange **Black-collared Bulbul** is a sought-after species in south-central Africa.*

Day 7. Transfer from Uige to Kalandula

After some great birding in the northern scarp forests we depart this area, bound for another fantastic birding zone, the greater Kalandula area. This will likely be quite a long drive, as sections of the road are very slow, and we anticipate arrival in the afternoon, following a morning departure. This area is home to arguably one of Angola's greatest natural wonders, the spectacular Kalandula Falls, and our afternoon will include a visit to the falls, where we'll admire their beauty before retiring to our comfortable hotel within view of the falls.

Overnight: Kalandula

Day 8. Birding around Kalandula and Kinjila

Today will be another exciting day, as we head into the swamp forests near Kalandula for, primarily, the sought-after **White-headed Robin-Chat**. This rare, localized, poorly known, yet

spectacular bird is another one of the major avian drawing cards on this tour! Initially thought to be extinct, this species was only rediscovered as recently as in the 1990s, and it is now known only from three separate locations, with a very small number of birders fortunate enough to have seen it. This species' ringing call echoes through the forest, but it is a shy species, and patience is required to obtain visuals. While this will be our main target, there are a host of other tantalizing species occurring in these swamp forests and their surroundings as well. The diminutive **White-spotted Flufftail** frequents these swampy areas, while the vocal **Ross's Turaco** bounds through the tree tops. The upper reaches also play host to the shy **Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo**, **Scaly-throated Honeyguide**, **Honeyguide Greenbul**, and **Brown-headed Apalis**, while the denser reaches lower down host **Grey-winged Robin-Chat**, **Cabanis's Greenbul**, and **Black-throated Wattle-eye**. Stands of miombo-type woodland surround the swamp forests, and we will be spending some time slowly working our way through these woodlands as well.



*The Kalandula area is home to some superb birding, and the poorly known and recently rediscovered **White-headed Robin-Chat** is one of the hallmark species of the country!*

This is arguably the best place in the world for the sought-after **Anchieta's Barbet**, while some other key targets in these woodlands will be **Thick-billed Cuckoo**, **Black Scimitarbill**, **Gorgeous Bushshrike**, **White-winged Black Tit**, **Miombo Wren-Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied Hyliota**, **Sharp-tailed Starling**, **Miombo Scrub Robin**, a trio of scarce **Sunbirds**, **Anchieta's**, **Bates's**, and **Bannerman's**, **Orange-winged Pytilia**, and **Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah**. Miombo woodland birding isn't always the easiest, as it is often quiet for long periods of time, as the birds frequent 'feeding parties' – large mixed groupings of birds moving through the woodland feeding – and there is usually only activity when you encounter one of these parties. Other species occurring in the area include **Red-crested Turaco** (uncommon), **Meyer's Parrot**, **Chinspot Batis**, **Black-crowned Tchagra**, **Retz's Helmetshrike**, **African Golden Oriole**, **Whistling**

Cisticola, African Thrush, Pale Flycatcher, Western Violet-backed, Amethyst, Green-throated, Variable and Copper Sunbirds, Yellow-throated Petronia, and Golden-breasted Bunting. African Barred Owlet occurs in the area, but we will need some luck to find it during the day. Nearby rivers are host to a huge number of highly prized **Red-throated Cliff Swallows**, which breed under some of the larger bridges, and we will search through the throngs of cliff swallows for scarcer birds such as **White-bibbed Swallow** and even **Brazza's Martin**. The quieter back-reaches of the rivers are home to **Shining-blue** and **Malachite Kingfishers**, while the surrounding reeds and damp grasslands host **Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Marsh Tchagra, Moustached Grass Warbler, Compact Weaver, Fan-tailed, Yellow-mantled, and Red-collared Widowbirds, Red-headed Quelea, Orange-breasted Waxbill, and Fülleborn's Longclaw**. Even the smallest of bushes near these rivers host the noisy **Yellow-throated Leaflove**. **African Scops Owl** is easily found here at night, and we will try for **Fiery-necked** and the spectacular **Pennant-winged Nightjars** as well.

Overnight: Kalandula



Angola is arguably the easiest place to see the scarce Anchieta's Barbet.

Day 9. Transfer from Kalandula to N'dalatando

We have the morning available for further birding in the greater Kalandula area to try for any birds we may have missed before departing this area with its scenic waterfalls bound for N'dalatando, where we will stay for a night. The drive is not too far, and with a birding stop or two, such as at the Lucala River for **Rock Pratincole**, we should arrive in the early afternoon, where we'll check into our hotel before setting off for the nearby Tombingo Forest, where we'll spend the rest of the afternoon. Essentially part of the far outlying reaches of the vast northern scarp forests, this area hosts many species similar to those we're likely to have seen birding around Quibaxe and Quitexe,

but also allows us a further opportunity to try for some of the species we may have missed. Flocks of **Red-fronted Parrots** commute overhead, while **Trumpeter**, **Piping**, **African Pied**, and **Crowned Hornbills** noisily move about. A large spectrum of barbets occurs, and we should encounter more of the strange **Bristle-nosed** and **Naked-faced Barbets**. We will also watch out for the scarce **Cassin's Honeybird** here, along with **Brown-eared Woodpecker**, while the forest is a great place to catch up with **Chestnut Wattle-eye**, **Black-winged Oriole**, **African Blue Flycatcher**, **Yellow-whiskered** and **Honeyguide Greenbuls**, **Red-tailed Bristlebill**, and **Rufous-crowned Eremomela**. **Green Hylia's** soft call rings out continuously, but the bird can be tricky to spot, while **Sooty Flycatcher** usually perches atop the highest branches of the canopy and is usually a bit easier to find. This is also a good area for the scarce **Tit Hylia**, we have another chance here at **White-spotted Flufftail** if we missed this bird around Kalandula, and rarer species such as **Woodhouse's Antpecker** occur as well.

Overnight: N'dalatando

Day 10. Birding Tombingo Forest and transfer to Kumbira Forest

We have the morning available for birding around Tombingo Forest, searching for the above-mentioned species, before beginning the drive to another of Angola's more famous birding areas, Kumbira Forest. As is consistent with most of the drives between sites in Angola, this will take some time due to slow roads, and we will likely only arrive in the late afternoon, from where we will journey to Conda, where we will spend the night.

Overnight: Conda



The national bird of Angola, Red-crested Turaco, is best found in the endemic-rich Kumbira Forest.

Days 11 - 12. Birding Kumbira Forest

We have two full days available to explore the extremely fragmented secondary forest patches that remain at Kumbira Forest. Despite this area being a recognized IBA (Important Bird Area), the entire region is still under pressure from slash-and-burn agriculture, and the forest will likely only become more fragmented, which doesn't bode well for the area's many specials. The early stages of the bumpy track heading towards the forest initially pass through more scrub/thicket-based habitat, which hosts one of the key targets of the area, the endemic **Pulitzer's Longbill**. This rare and difficult-to-find species is always tricky to pin down as they skulk in thicker vegetation, making them difficult to see. While searching for this bird we're likely to also come across other edge-based species, such as **Blue-spotted Wood Dove**, **Red-backed Mousebird**, **Gorgeous Bushshrike**, **Petit's Cuckooshrike**, **Bubbling Cisticola**, the endemic **Hartert's Camaroptera**, **Carmelite**, **Olive-bellied**, and **Purple-banded Sunbirds**, **Holub's Golden Weaver**, **Black-and-white Mannikin**, the scarce **Landana Firefinch**, and **Black-faced Canary**. We will also pass through more modified habitats, especially subsistence agricultural fields. These areas can also prove quite rewarding and host a similar suite of species as mentioned above, along with additional species such as **Red-necked Spurfowl** and a host of seedeaters, including **Black-winged Red Bishop**, **Red-collared** and **White-winged Widowbirds**, **Blue**, **Grey**, and **Common Waxbills**, and if we're lucky, the scarce **Red-headed Bluebill**.

Before long we enter the first of the degraded 'forest' patches, and this is where the bulk of our time will be spent as we explore the roadside vegetation along with a few trails venturing deeper into the area. First up in the forested areas are usually some of the more common species such as **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird**, **Green-backed Woodpecker**, **Angolan Batis**, **Pink-footed Puffback**, **Rufous-vented Paradise Flycatcher**, **Green Crombec**, **Buff-throated Apalis**, and **Black-necked Weaver**. We should also start encountering the first of the many specials of the area such as the jaw-droppingly gorgeous **Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye**, the snazzy **African Broadbill**, the boisterous **Dusky Tits**, the vocal **Yellow-throated Nicator**, and a trio of **Greenbuls**, **Yellow-whiskered**, the sought-after **Falkenstein's**, and the near-endemic **Pale-olive**. The spectacular **Black-throated Apalis** keeps to the high canopies, while the unusual local subspecies of **Southern Hyliota** typically moves about a bit lower down, with **Fraser's Rufous Thrush** sitting silently in the undergrowth. The deep booms of **Gabon Coucal** ring from the small clearings in the forest, while the soft, melodic calls of **Forest Scrub Robin** is never far away. Of the main specials, however, this is the best site for the country's national bird, **Red-crested Turaco**, and their loud calls give away their presence as they clamber surprisingly agilely in the canopy. The dainty **Gabela Akalat** frequents the dense tangles lower down and requires a quick eye to pick up on its rapid movements in these low-light areas. Other specials to be found in the area are **Brown-chested Alethe** and **Brown Illadopsis**, and patience is the name of the game to see these reclusive species.

Arguably the trickiest special here is the rare, endemic **Gabela Bushshrike**. This incredibly localized species frequents dense vine tangles and associated thickets, a habitat type which is being cleared at an alarming rate, putting this species at further risk and making it even more difficult to find. Similar to its cousin further north in the country, Braun's Bushshrike, this species has a distinctive 'croaking' call which carries some distance and for which we'll be on high alert. The forest also hosts a number of raptors, and possible species include **African Harrier-Hawk**, **Brown Snake Eagle**, **Long-crested Eagle**, **Lizard Buzzard**, **African Goshawk**, **Augur Buzzard**, and even the uncommon **Crowned Eagle**. **African Wood Owl** is regular after dark. Other species to

be found here include **Tambourine Dove**, **African Green Pigeon**, **African Emerald Cuckoo**, **Crowned Hornbill**, **Chestnut Wattle-eye**, **African Blue Flycatcher**, **Green Hylia**, **African Dusky Flycatcher**, **Little Green** and **Superb Sunbirds**, and **Grey-headed Nigrita**.

Overnight: Conda



The stunning Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye provides a bright splash of color in the forests.

Day 13. Transfer from Kumbira Forest to Mount Moco

After two great days birding around Kumbira Forest we'll get going early in the day to maximize our time around Mount Moco, the highest mountain in Angola. True to form, the drive will take us a while, and we anticipate arriving in the early afternoon. The habitat is extremely varied at Mount Moco, and the lower slopes see us transiting through grassy floodplains and fragmented miombo woodland patches before reaching a montane grassland plateau that then takes us to the actual base of the massif proper. We will likely concentrate our efforts this afternoon on the lower slopes, exploring the rank, grassy floodplains/depressions and miombo woodland patches. The area will likely be quite dry at this time of year, and we don't expect much water to be around. Our main targets here will be the poorly known **Brazza's Martin** and the incredibly localized **Bocage's Sunbird** and **Bocage's Weaver**. We will also search these areas for other sought-after species like **Black-collared Bulbul**, **Marsh Widowbird**, and the scarce **Dusky Twinspot**, while other species possible here include the likes of **Coppery-tailed Coucal**, **Little Bee-eater**, **Croaking Cisticola**, **Fan-tailed Grassbird**, **Hartlaub's Babbler**, **Sooty Chat**, **Brown Firefinch**, **Fawn-breasted** and **Orange-breasted Waxbills**, and **Fülleborn's Longclaw**. Venturing into the miombo, we will need to keep an ear open for the excited calls heralding the arrival of a bird party, and the stunted and fragmented woodland available here make this a bit easier, as we don't have massive areas to explore. The birding can be incredibly exciting, and regular party members include **Yellow-**

fronted Tinkerbird, Cardinal Woodpecker, Chinspot Batis, Brubru, White-crested Helmetshrike, Black Cuckooshrike, Green-capped Eremomela, Amethyst Sunbird, Yellow-throated Petronia, Red-headed Weaver, and Golden-breasted Bunting. As we follow these parties through the woodland we'll also be searching for more specials, such as Anchieta's Barbet, White-tailed Blue Flycatcher, Red-capped Crombec, Miombo Wren-Warbler, Rufous-bellied Tit, Salvadori's and the spectacular Black-necked Eremomelas, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, African Spotted Creeper, Miombo Scrub Robin, Miombo Rock Thrush, Anchieta's and Western Violet-backed Sunbirds, Orange-winged Pytilia, Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah, and Wood Pipit. Come evening we'll transfer to Huambo, where we'll spend the night.

Overnight: Huambo

Day 14. Birding Mount Moco and surroundings

Looking forward to a full day of birding, we'll make an early start to Mount Moco, bound for the small, relict patches of montane forest at the top of the mountain. Once we reach the village of Kanjonde right at the base of the massif we'll begin the walk up to the top, where the main forest lies. Please note that this is a very challenging hike over difficult, rocky terrain (not level pathways), including navigating steep slopes to get to the edge of the forest, and only those who are fit will be able to complete this arduous hike. Once we have made our way to the main forest patch our effort will be rewarded, as a host of exciting species awaits. The forest edge is one of the best places to track down the rare and localized endemic **Swierstra's Francolin**, although seeing this bird remains a difficult challenge. Within the forest itself, though, we'll be targeting chiefly the scarce **Margaret's Batis**, here at its type locality, along with **Western Tinkerbird**, **Black-backed Barbet**, **Evergreen Forest Warbler**, **African Hill Babbler**, **Grey Apalis**, **Bocage's Akalat**, the rare and localized **Black-chinned Weaver**, the poorly known **Dusky Twinspot**, and the endemic **Angolan Slaty Flycatcher** and **Angolan Waxbill**. Other possible species here include **Schalow's Turaco**, **Olive Woodpecker**, **Red-throated Wryneck**, **Cabanis's Greenbul**, **African Yellow Warbler**, **Bronzy Sunbird**, **Dusky Indigobird**, **Brimstone** and **Yellow-crowned Canaries**, and the curious local population of **Thick-billed Seed eater**.



*Mount Moco hosts many exciting species, and this **Angolan Lark** is one we hope to find!*

Moving away from the forest, the rocky slopes of the mountain host interesting species such as **Wailing Cisticola**, **Mountain Wheatear**, **Striped** and **Long-billed Pipits**, **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting**, and another curious local population, this time of **Rock-loving Cisticola**, which is believed by many authorities to be a separate species, Huambo Cisticola. The proteas here and other flowering plants host **Oustalet's** and the endemic **Ludwig's Double-collared Sunbirds**, while we must also keep an eye overhead for the likes of **Augur** and **Red-necked Buzzards**, **Rock Kestrel**, and **Lanner Falcon**, all of which frequent the area, along with the poorly known **Fernando Po Swift**. Gradually we'll begin descending the mountain, eventually arriving back to Kanjonde, where we'll take a break before resuming our birding in the afternoon. For those who are unable to complete the full hike up to the main forest patch there are several small patches on the lower slopes of the mountain, not far from the village, where some of the species mentioned above can be found, such as **Western Tinkerbird**, **Grey Apalis**, **Bocage's Akalat**, **Dusky Twinspot**, **Angolan Waxbill**, and **Schalow's Turaco**. We'll explore the montane grasslands lining the plateau once we clear the miombo woodland for the afternoon, searching here for species such as **Finsch's Francolin**, the near-endemic **Angolan Lark**, and the stunning **Black-and-rufous Swallow**. Although vocal, the francolins remain as difficult to see as ever, while the lark with its fascinating song is usually more confiding and the swallows race up and down the valleys among more common cousins, including **Grey-rumped**, **Lesser Striped**, and **Greater Striped Swallows**. Burns in this area attract **Capped Wheatears** along with good numbers of **Red-capped Larks** and **Plain-backed Pipits**, while **African Marsh Harrier** is a frequent sight above the grasslands.

Overnight: Huambo

Day 15. Transfer from Mount Moco to Benguela

We have the morning available to explore the lower slopes of Mount Moco, searching for any species that we may have missed, primarily within the miombo woodland or the rank, grassy depressions. Our drive today is quite a bit shorter than the last few we have undertaken, and our afternoon will be spent exploring the salt pans and lagoons around the coastal towns of Lobito and Benguela for a host of waterbirds. One of our primary targets here will be the sought-after **Chestnut-banded Plover**, while a good supporting cast of species will likely include **Cape Teal**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Greater** and **Lesser Flamingos**, **African Spoonbill**, **Great White Pelican**, **Reed**, **White-breasted**, and **Cape Cormorants**, various other waders/shorebirds such as **Black-winged Stilt**, **Pied Avocet**, **White-fronted** and **Kittlitz's Plovers**, **Whimbrel**, and **Common Greenshank**, along with **Kelp Gull** and a host of **Terns**, including **Caspian**, **Sandwich** and **Royal**.

Overnight: Benguela

Day 16. Transfer from Benguela to Lubango

We will have an early start heading into the hills near Benguela, where we will get our first taste of the true 'Namibian' specials. The dry, rocky acacia habitat along with the barren Namib Desert are core Namibian habitats, and both follow the coastal plain and reach their northernmost point here. Our morning will see us focus on the dry, rocky acacia habitat. One of the primary targets here is the reclusive **Hartlaub's Spurfowl**. This small gamebird frequents rocky hillsides, where their loud, duetting call rings out from all parts of the hills and persistent scanning of exposed rocks is usually rewarded. We will also explore some of the drier, acacia-lined riverbeds, which host our remaining targets. The larger trees play host to **Rüppell's Parrot**, **Rosy-faced Lovebird**, **Carp's Tit**, and **Bare-cheeked Babbler**, while the denser areas of bush within the riverbeds host **Pearl-spotted Owlet**, **Pale-olive Greenbul**, **Swamp Boubou**, and **Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush**. **Grey Go-away-birds** perch conspicuously, while noisy **Damara Red-billed** and **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills** are never far from sight.



A denizen of the mountains, the *Hartlaub's Spurfiowl* is one of the main targets near Benguela.

The surroundings are covered by typical dry acacia thornveld, which hosts a number of species including **Acacia Pied Barbet**, **Pirit Batis**, **Bokmakierie**, **Brown-crowned Tchagra**, **African Red-eyed Bulbul**, **Long-billed Crombec**, **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Black-chested Prinia**, **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Cape Starling**, **White-browed Scrub Robin**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver**, **White-browed Sparrow-Weaver**, **Green-winged Pytilia**, **Red-headed Finch**, and **Blue and Violet-eared Waxbills**. Areas of open ground host **Namaqua Dove** and the stunning and unique **White-tailed Shrike**, and watching the latter 'giant batises' never fails to impress! We will also search overhead for **Verreaux's** and **Booted Eagles** and **Bateleur**, while both **Mottled** and **Böhm's Spinetails** frequent the skies above baobab trees. If we're lucky, we may even find scarcer species such as **Orange River Francolin** in the area. We will eventually have to tear ourselves away from the fine birding here, as we transfer to the large city of Lubango. This is a long drive, and we will likely arrive in the late afternoon, from where we will check into our comfortable lodge.

Overnight: Casper Lodge, Lubango

Days 17 - 18. Birding Tundavala and Namibe

We have two full days to bird in the area. Our first day will be dedicated to birding the Tundavala Gap and the surrounding escarpment, located just outside Lubango. Another of Angola's more famous natural sites, the Tundavala Gap affords spectacular views over the escarpment as it rapidly drops from the high plateau down to the coastal plain, more than 1000m below. While the core habitat up here is rocky grasslands, the valleys and gullies contain some forest-type habitat and the lower slopes just above Lubango town contain an interesting scrubby-woodland habitat. Working

our way up from the bottom, the scrubby habitat is arguably the least interesting, even though it does hold many interesting species like **Red-backed Mousebird**, **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird**, **Bennett's Woodpecker**, **Rattling** and **Tinkling Cisticolas**, **Hartlaub's Babbler**, **Miombo Rock Thrush**, a host of **Sunbirds** including **Ludwig's Double-collared** and **Oustalet's**, and various seedeaters such as **Blue**, **Violet-eared**, and the endemic **Angolan Waxbills** as well as **Brimstone Canary**. The grasslands too don't have much interest, although top of the list here goes to the scarce **Finsch's Francolin**, while other species to be sought include **Red-capped Lark**, **Wing-snapping Cisticola**, **Buffy Pipit**, and **Quailfinch**.



Angolan Cave Chat is a big target in the rocky mountains of the Tundavala escarpment.

Once at the top, the various valleys and gullies and even the sheer escarpment drop-off itself host the area's most exciting birds. While taking in the spectacular views of the Tundavala Gap we have a chance for several aerial species, of which **Bradfield's Swift** should form the bulk of the numbers. **Alpine Swift**, **Rock Martin**, and **Black Saw-wing** should also feature, and we will keep an eye out for raptors, including **Augur Buzzard**, **Rock Kestrel**, and **Booted Eagle**. The open rocky areas are home to **Short-toed Rock Thrush** and **Striped Pipit** along with two of the main specials here, **Rockrunner** and **Angolan Cave Chat**. The latter two species typically require some work to track down as they slink through gaps in the rocks, and we will be sure to put in some time to track them down. The rare **Swierstra's Francolin** occurs in these areas as well and will be another key target, should we have missed this bird earlier at Mount Moco. Where the forest-type habitat begins we'll be on the lookout for **Grey Apalis**, **Angolan Slaty Flycatcher**, **Ludwig's Double-collared Sunbird**, and **Angolan Waxbill**, while species such as **Western Tinkerbird** and even **Bocage's Akalat** are possible as well.

For our second full day we will transfer down the escarpment to the dry coastal plain via the incredible Leba Pass. We will likely have a few birding stops as we descend this well-constructed

and stunningly scenic pass, with the slopes featuring a forest-type zone. While we should have seen most of the possible species here on the tour already, we do have further chances for birds such as **Schalow's Turaco**, **Angolan Batis**, **African Golden Oriole**, **Grey-backed Camaroptera**, **Ashy Flycatcher**, and the near-endemic **Pale-olive Greenbul**, among others. Our main birding, however, will only start once we have descended to the plains below, from where we will initially explore some of the dry, deciduous woodland, riverbeds, and acacia thornveld. Although a similar suite of species to what we sought around Benguela is possible here as well, arguably our biggest target is the localized and somewhat nomadic **Cinderella Waxbill**.

Other specials to be searched for here are **Rüppell's Parrot**, **Monteiro's Hornbill**, **White-tailed Shrike**, **Carp's Tit**, **Meves's Starling**, and **Chestnut Weaver**. While searching for these birds we're also likely to come across the many other species occurring in the area, including **Emerald-spotted Wood Dove**, **Grey Go-away-bird**, **Red-faced Mousebird**, **Black-collared Barbet**, **Golden-tailed Woodpecker**, **White-crested Helmetshrike**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **African Red-eyed Bulbul**, **Yellow-breasted Apalis**, **Cape and Violet-backed Starlings**, **Yellow-billed Oxpecker** (on local cattle), **Groundscraper Thrush**, and **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah**. Transferring further west toward the coast the habitat rapidly changes and becomes increasingly drier. Stands of acacia thornveld in these dry zones host many species more characteristic of further south, such as **Common Scimitarbill**, **Pririt Batis**, **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Bokmakierie**, **Ashy Tit**, **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Black-chested Prinia**, **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Chestnut-vented Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied Eremomela**, **Kalahari Scrub Robin**, **White-bellied** and **Dusky Sunbirds**, **Scaly-feathered Weaver**, **Red-headed Finch**, and **White-throated** and **Yellow Canaries**.

Continuing further we enter into the barren Namib Desert, and the dry gravel plains here host another suite of exciting species. The stately **Ludwig's Bustard** and the sought-after **Rüppell's Korhaan** stride through the open plains, while we will need to put in a concerted effort to track down the nomadic **Namaqua Sandgrouse**. Walking through the plains is also the best way to find the many lark species occurring here, of which we'll be searching for **Stark's** and **Benguela Long-billed Larks** along with more widespread species such as **Spike-heeled Lark** and **Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark**. Not to be outdone is the ghostly white **Tractrac Chat**, its close cousin, **Karoo Chat**, and the puzzling **Chat Flycatcher**. **Lark-like Bunting** can be present in large numbers, while we'll need to keep an eye out for **Pale-winged Starling** as they roam the plains. **Pale Chanting Goshawk** is often easily seen perched atop roadside poles, as is the western race of **Southern Fiscal**. The coast at Namibe will be our end-point, from where we'll retrace our steps back to Lubango after a great day trip and settle in for our last group dinner.

Overnight: Casper Lodge, Lubango

Day 19. Departure from Lubango

Today is our departure day, and the tour concludes after breakfast with a transfer to the airport in Lubango, from where we'll fly back home.



The Kalandula falls are exquisite, and one of the major natural attractions of the country!

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 from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	19 days
Group Size:	6 participants plus driver and guide in 1 x 9-seater vehicle (everyone gets a window seat) or 12 participants in 2 x 9-seater vehicles with a 2nd guide (everyone gets a window seat)
Dates:	18 June - 6 July 2024
Start:	Luanda, Angola
End:	Lubango, Angola
Prices:	US\$9,990 per person sharing based on 6 participants (or 12 in 2 vehicles with a 2nd guide) (2024)
Single Supplements:	US\$850 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation (no camping)
Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 19)

Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance fees
All ground transport, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

International flights (to Luanda, and from Lubango)
Visas
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))