



**ZIMBABWE: AFRICAN PITTA, MIOMBO WOODLANDS AND
EASTERN HIGHLANDS BIRDING TOUR**

**21 NOVEMBER – 03 DECEMBER 2024
21 NOVEMBER – 03 DECEMBER 2025**



African Pitta will be the primary focus of this Zimbabwe birding tour.

Zimbabwe is an absolutely fabulous country – scenically wonderful, with very friendly people fluent in English and a long history in wilderness conservation. This has led to the establishment of a number of excellent and highly biodiverse reserves and national parks throughout the country. Zimbabwe has a good road network, and it also holds the distinction of being one of the few African countries in which you can see a great deal without the use of a 4x4 vehicle. With an improving political leadership and the introduction of US Dollars as tender throughout the country, Zimbabwe is once again becoming a very popular destination for birders and travelers alike.

This tour starts in the country's capital city, Harare, before we soon transition to the famous Mana Pools National Park, a lush reserve 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 full of excellent birds. Some of our early highlights are likely to include the highly desired **African Pitta** (for which this tour is specifically timed), the localized **Lilian's Lovebird** and a wide spectrum of mammals. Indeed, Mana Pools is a famous predator viewing area, with high concentrations of **Lion**, **Leopard** and the rare **African Wild Dog**, all serving as a precursor to the wonders that await.



African Wild Dog is a major target whilst at Mana Pools.

After a few days in magical Mana Pools, we make our way back south to Harare where we visit various miombo woodland birding areas around the city for the day – this is a unique south-central-African-restricted woodland that has a whole host of bird species restricted solely to this habitat and is of significant importance!

After a full day of Harare miombo birding, we transition to the spectacular Eastern Highlands for the next leg. The Eastern Highlands' evergreen forests hold some highly 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, such as **Swynnerton's Robin**. We also bird mountain grasslands for the Vulnerable (IUCN) **Blue Swallow**, this area being one of the last remaining strongholds for this scarce, rapidly declining species.

After four nights in Zimbabwe's lush Eastern Highlands, we make our way back to Harare (birding our way back, of course) where the tour ends after a final night in the capital city. This exciting Zimbabwe birding tour gives you the opportunity to find the near-mythical **African Pitta** while also taking in some highly range-restricted specials, along with some truly spectacular megafauna highlights too.

This Zimbabwe birding tour incorporates four nights in an all-inclusive, private lodge in Mana Pools National Park, which is one of Africa's great wildlife havens. Mana Pools has proven to be one of the most reliable locations for finding the most-wanted **African Pitta**, around which this tour is designed.

For those who would like to target several range-restricted and tricky-to-find Mozambique specials, you can join our [Mozambique Birding Tour: Crab-plover and Lowland Forests](#) which immediately follows this Zimbabwe bird watching tour. On this trip we spend time in the lowland forests of central Mozambique looking for **White-chested Alethe**, **East Coast Akalat**, **Chestnut-fronted Helmetshrike** and other desirable specials. We then move south to the coast where we search for **Crab-plover**, **Saunders's Tern** and many other coastal birds.



*The localized **Boulder Chat** is virtually endemic to Zimbabwe, and is a major birding target.*

Itinerary (13 days/12 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Harare

Our international flights arrive in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare, (usually by midday), and we transfer to our comfortable guest house within this city's suburbs, where we spend the first night. The gardens sometimes host **Variable Sunbirds**, 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 will try to track down the prized **Boulder Chat** just outside of Harare. Here, we will get our first taste of miombo birding, which is likely to produce **Miombo Rock Thrush**, **Southern Hyliota**, **Red-faced Crombec** and **Eastern Miombo Sunbird**. More widespread species also occur around here, and are likely to include **Southern Yellow White-eye** and **Tropical Boubou**.

Overnight: Harare

Days 2 - 5. Mana Pools National Park

Today, we will have a long transfer (roughly five hours of travel time) to reach our next destination of the trip – Mana Pools National Park, and thus we will be keen to get going early. While the trip to Mana Pools will likely be uneventful, stops en-route, such as around Lion's Den, may provide us with species such as **Black-chested Snake Eagle**, **Red-faced Cisticola**, **Copper Sunbird** and the highly prized **Racket-tailed Roller**. Eventually, we will descend sharply into the verdant Zambezi Valley, and proceed onwards to our comfortable and well-appointed exclusive lodge, in time for our late afternoon birding.



Dickinson's Kestrel is one of many raptor species we may see around Mana Pools.

At this time of the year, the area regularly has good numbers of displaying **African Pittas** and from our first afternoon, we will be on the lookout for these mythical and most-wanted intra-African migrants. Four nights and three full days in Mana Pools will give us excellent chances of finding pittas while also giving us ample time to enjoy the area's rich birdlife, not to mention the impressive numbers of megafauna in the area.

Mana Pools is another of Africa's great game parks, and it is one of the continent's premier wildlife-viewing areas! Like their mammal counterparts, the birdlife within the area is nothing short of outstanding – with an incredibly diverse array of species, including some very special birds, all awaiting us! We will spend four nights in the area, and our time will be taken up with a mix of birding/wildlife drives as we navigate through the area. We will also undertake short walks through the wilderness – mostly in our pursuit of **African Pitta**. Our focus will be on the birds and mammals alike in this area, and we find that the two work in perfect harmony with each other. A wide range of habitat is covered, from mixed bushveld on rocky slopes covered in baobab trees, sections of tall, gallery mopane woodland, through to dense riverine thickets, dry riverbeds, and large areas of open riverine woodland, with scattered pans and wetlands dotted throughout the region. The mighty Zambezi River flows through the park and is the primary reason for the incredible diversity here.



*The localized **Lillian's Lovebird** will be looked for in the woodlands of Mana Pools.*

Although the bird species occurring here are too many to mention, we will focus our efforts on the following 'specials'. The range of mixed woodlands, bushveld and baobab-dominated areas host one of our core targets, **Lillian's Lovebird**, along with the likes of both **Mottled** and **Böhm's Spinetails**, **Bennett's Woodpecker**, **Dickinson's Kestrel**, **Meyer's Parrot**, **Retz's Helmetshrike**, **Mosque Swallow** and **Orange-winged Pytilia**. Many raptors nest within these areas, and we should keep our eyes open as **African Harrier-Hawk**, **Hooded** and **White-backed**

Vulture, Brown Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Martial and Tawny Eagles, African Hawk-Eagle, Lizard Buzzard, Dark Chanting Goshawk and Shikra, are all likely. We will search areas of mopane woodland for the scarce **Arnot's Chat** and if we're lucky, **Racket-tailed Roller**.

The denser thickets, often lining some of the smaller streams and dry riverbeds, will be searched for many denizens, most importantly **African Pitta**, along with the likes of **Crested Guineafowl, Narina Trogon, Eastern Nicator**, the localized **Livingstone's Flycatcher, Purple-banded Sunbird** and **Red-throated Twinspot**, amongst others.

A day trip from our lodge to visit the many wetlands and pans, along with the Zambezi River itself, should produce a wide array of waterbirds, and we're sure to find a number of ducks, plovers, storks, herons and egrets here. Some of the more important species we'll be targeting include **Long-toed and White-crowned Lapwings, Greater Painted-snipe, Collared Pratincole, Saddle-billed Stork and Goliath Heron. Western Banded Snake Eagle** can often be found in the trees surrounding these water bodies, and we may also stumble upon the highly prized **Pel's Fishing Owl** if we're very lucky. Nocturnal birding can also be rewarding here, and the bulk of our focus will be on finding the scarce **Three-banded Courser**. Other species such as **African Barred Owlet, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl** and **African Wood Owl** are usually around, along with **Fiery-necked Nightjar** and even the spectacular **Pennant-winged Nightjar**.



*The scarce **Three-banded Courser** can be reliably seen in Mana Pools.*

Mana Pools is famous for its vast numbers of **African Elephants** and its predator sightings, in particular **African Wild Dog**, with several packs of this rare and highly prized predator occurring throughout the park. Additionally, **Lion** and **Leopard** are regularly seen. Some of the other mammals we are likely to see here include **African Buffalo, Greater Kudu, Eland, Waterbuck, Plains Zebra** and **Hippopotamus**. We also have a chance of seeing some of the more nocturnally

active mammals found here such as **African Civet**, **Side-striped Jackal**, **Spotted Hyena** and **Honey Badger**.

Overnight: Mhara River Camp, Mana Pools

Day 6. Mana Pools to Harare

We have a full final morning available to explore the area, granting us the opportunity to search for any of the birds and mammals mentioned above (Days 2 – 5), that we may not have seen yet. Eventually, we will need to depart this incredible wildlife park, and make the trip back to Harare (roughly five hours). En-route we will likely stop off again in the Lion's Den area where we can look for **Marsh Owl**, **Croaking Cisticola**, **Bat Hawk** and several other exciting species. We will then likely arrive in the late afternoon, and will settle in for our evening meal together, with the exciting prospect of a full day of miombo birding the following day!

Overnight: Harare

Day 7. Birding Harare

Harare is a birdy city, with the lush gardens and woodlands allowing birdlife to thrive. Additionally, the city and some of the surrounding areas on the Mashonaland Plateau host some of the finest tracts of the unique miombo woodland in the country. Dominated by *Brachystegia* trees, covered in lichen and moss, this woodland hosts several species virtually confined to these patches. We have a full day at our disposal to explore some of the birding sites in and around Harare, specifically targeting the miombo specials.



*Miombo woodlands near Harare should produce sightings of **Southern Hyliota**.*

Birding in the miombo can be tough going, with the birds often confined to ‘bird parties’ – where groups of birds gather, forage and feed together, slowly moving through the woodland. With enough time, we are bound to come across a few of these ‘bird parties’. Species such as **White-crested Helmetshrike** and **Green-capped Eremomela** are often the first birds to be found, before the trees come alive with other species. Some of our primary targets will be species such as **Southern Hyliota**, **White-breasted Cuckooshrike**, **Green-backed Honeybird**, **Red-faced Crombec**, **Miombo Tit**, **Grey Penduline Tit**, **Stierling’s Wren-Warbler** and **Cabanis’s Bunting**. Harare is a great place to see **Whyte’s Barbet**, and we will hopefully come across this prized barbet during our stay.

Harare is also famous for the excellent tropical wetland birding it hosts – however, this is only during the rainy summer season (Jan – Mar), and the majority of the wetlands will be dry at this time of the year. Despite this, we may still find residents such as **Marsh Owl**, **Senegal Coucal**, **African Yellow Warbler**, a trio of longclaws, **Cape, Yellow-throated** and the prized **Rosy-throated Longclaws**, **Orange-breasted Waxbill** and **Yellow-mantled Widowbird**.

Overnight: Harare



The prized African Spotted Creeper is a big target on this tour.

Day 8. Transfer to Bvumba Mountains, 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, and then upwards to the mid altitudes of the Bvumba Mountains. We have a fair 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. Goshu Park is another fantastic site, and it allows us our best chances for some species such as **African Spotted Creeper**, **Whyte’s Barbet**, **Miombo Rock Thrush**, **Miombo Tit**, **Wood**

Pipit, Western Violet-backed Sunbird and Black-eared Seedeater. Time-dependent, we may also bird some woodlands near Mutare for the uncommon and range-restricted **Cinnamon-breasted Tit**.

Eventually, we reach the lush Bvumba Highlands where we will stay at the rustic yet charming Seldomseen Cottages, set right within some of the best montane forest in the region. Here, almost all of the Eastern Highlands' forest species occur right on our doorstep! We will spend two nights here, birding the lush grounds and their surrounds. We will likely spend the afternoon exploring the Seldomseen grounds and familiarizing ourselves with some of the specials occurring in the area. Common and vocal species we're likely to see include some of the area's prized birds, such as **Chirinda Apalis, Roberts's Warbler and Stripe-cheeked Greenbul**, while other more widespread species such as **Cape Batis, Olive Bushshrike, Cape Robin-Chat, African Dusky Flycatcher, Olive Thrush and Olive Sunbird** abound in the grounds.

Overnight: Seldomseen Cottages, Bvumba Highlands



The attractive Swynnerton's Robin occurs in the forest of the Bvumba Mountains.

Day 9. Continued birding in the Bvumba Highlands

We have the full day to explore this area to try and find all its many special birds. The Eastern Highlands also host some excellent miombo woodlands, and we will be sure to include some time in these during our stay. These woodlands are the primary range for the scarce **Cinnamon-breasted Tit**, and this species will likely be our main target. Of course, these woodlands support the full array of miombo specials, and if we missed any species such as **African Spotted Creeper, Cabanis's Bunting, Whyte's Barbet, Red-faced Crombec, Miombo Rock Thrush and Miombo Tit**, we will be able to try again for these species. We may also be lucky and find one of

the 'regular' **Collared Flycatchers** here (this is a rare migrant to southern Africa), while the grassy slopes are good for the scarce **Tree Pipit**.

We will need to put more time into the forested areas, as they host the bulk of the specials, and the very localized **Swynnerton's Robin** will be one of our main targets. Noisy **Livingstone's Turacos** bound in the treetops, while secretive **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeons** call from high up within deep cover, with dainty **White-tailed Crested Flycatchers** never far away. The understory, however, is often of more importance, supporting the likes of **Orange Ground Thrush**, **Barratt's Warbler**, **White-starred Robin**, **Green Twinspot** and the ultra-secretive **Buff-spotted Flufftail**, this being one of the best areas to see the latter! **Black-fronted Bushshrikes** keep to the thicker tangles, while species such as **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds** aren't shy to show themselves, with **Lemon** and **Tambourine Doves** exploding from the forest floor. The open areas play host to species such as **Cape Grassbird**, **African Yellow Warbler**, **Singing Cisticola** and the cute **Yellow-bellied Waxbill**, while some of the protea-clad hills and flowering trees support a wealth of nectar-loving species, such as **Bronzy Sunbird** and if we're lucky, **Gurney's Sugarbird**. Raptors abound in this area, and we'll be sure to keep our eyes out for **Crowned** and **Long-crested Eagles**, along with **Augur Buzzard**, while the smaller **African Goshawk** and **Black Sparrowhawk** are never far away from forested areas.

Overnight: Seldomseen Cottages, Bvumba Highlands



*The Vulnerable and declining **Blue Swallow** is still relatively common at Inyanga.*

Day 10. Transfer to Aberfoyle Lodge, woodland birding en route

We will have one final morning to perhaps target any missing forest specials before we make our way north to the Honde Valley and Aberfoyle Lodge. One of our stops en route will see us calling into the incredible Nyanga Mountains where we will focus our attention on the scarce **Blue**

Swallow – here at one of the last strongholds for this species. After making our way down along the winding Honde Valley road, we will eventually reach the comfortable Aberfoyle Lodge, where we will be based for two nights.

Overnight: Aberfoyle Lodge, Honde Valley

Day 11. Birding Aberfoyle Lodge and the Honde Valley

After our late afternoon arrival the previous day, this will be our first chance for birding this incredible area. We will spend the day visiting sites around the Honde Valley, such as the famous ‘Wamba Marsh’, Katiyo Tea Estate and the expansive grounds of the lodge itself. The Honde Valley is a scenic area with huge tea estates punctuated by villages, subsistence farmland and small patches of attractive riverine forest. The Mutarazi Falls can be seen in the distance as they plummet an impressive 2,500 feet (~760 meters) from the Nyanga Highlands which tower above this fertile valley. Feeders around the lodge attract some strikingly beautiful birds such as **Red-throated Twinspot** and **Red-faced Crimsonwing**, and nearby riverine forests are home to the scarce **Pallid Honeyguide**, **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**, **White-eared Barbet**, **African Broadbill**, **Common Square-tailed Drongo**, and as always, many others. The rivers running through the area host **Half-collared Kingfisher** and **Mountain Wagtail**. **Ayres’s Hawk-Eagle** is often seen in the area, as is **Palm-nut Vulture**. Keeping an eye skywards might produce sightings of **Scarce** and **Mottled Swifts**, both of which have colonies in the area, and are a regular sight overhead. **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.



We should see the attractive **Red-throated Twinspot** (here, a female on the left, and male on the right) on this tour.

Some of the outlying areas away from the lodge host other exciting species such as **Blue-spotted Wood Dove**, **Green-backed Woodpecker**, **Moustached Grass Warbler**, **Fan-tailed Grassbird** (Broad-tailed Warbler), **Marsh Tchagra**, **Singing Cisticola**, **Grey Waxbill**, **Magpie Mannikin** and **Black-winged Red Bishop**, amongst others. This is a very birdy area, and we are sure to see a high number of species as we traverse the valley.

Overnight: Aberfoyle Lodge, Honde Valley

Day 12. Transfer from Honde Valley to Harare

We will have a final morning's birding in the Honde Valley, perhaps having another search for the rare **Lesser Seedcracker**, before moving back westwards towards Harare. Today is mostly a transfer day; however, we can also use it as a backup day to look for any missing targets, perhaps spending more time in the miombo woodlands looking for specials such as **Green-backed Honeybird** or **African Spotted Creeper**. We will likely arrive in Harare in the late afternoon and enjoy one final group dinner this evening.

Overnight: Harare



The beautiful and rare Lesser Seedcracker.

Days 13. Departure from Harare

The tour comes to an end after breakfast – where you can depart at your leisure. Please note that there are no activities scheduled for the day, however, should you have a late afternoon/evening departure from Harare, we will be able to assist in organizing activities for you.

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: | 13 days |
| Group Size: | 4 – 8 |
| Dates: | 21 November – 03 December 2024 21 November – 03 December 2025 |
| Start: | Harare, Zimbabwe |
| End: | Harare, Zimbabwe |
| Prices: | \$7,250 per person sharing (2024) \$7,805 per person sharing (2025) |
| Single Supplements: | \$935 (2024) \$1,025 (2025) |

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 13)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance & conservation fees
All ground transport, including airport pick-up and drop-off
All drinks at Mana Pools

Price excludes:

International/domestic flights (to/from Harare)
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](#))