

Lochinvar National Park, Zambian endemics & African Pitta



Dates:

- Friday 6 – Monday 16 December 2024
- Friday 12 – Monday 22 December 2025

Join either the whole tour, or only the Lochinvar, endemics and/or African Pitta sections. Start and end in Lusaka though flexible.

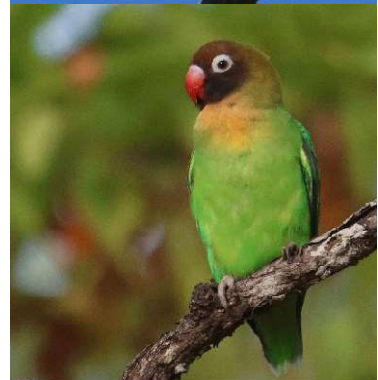
Number of people: Flexible

Package type: Birds & Bush – we will spend all our time in the field, where the focus is on birding and exploring, with ample attention for all wildlife.

Accommodation type: Mobile camp & lodging



BIRDING ZAMBIA



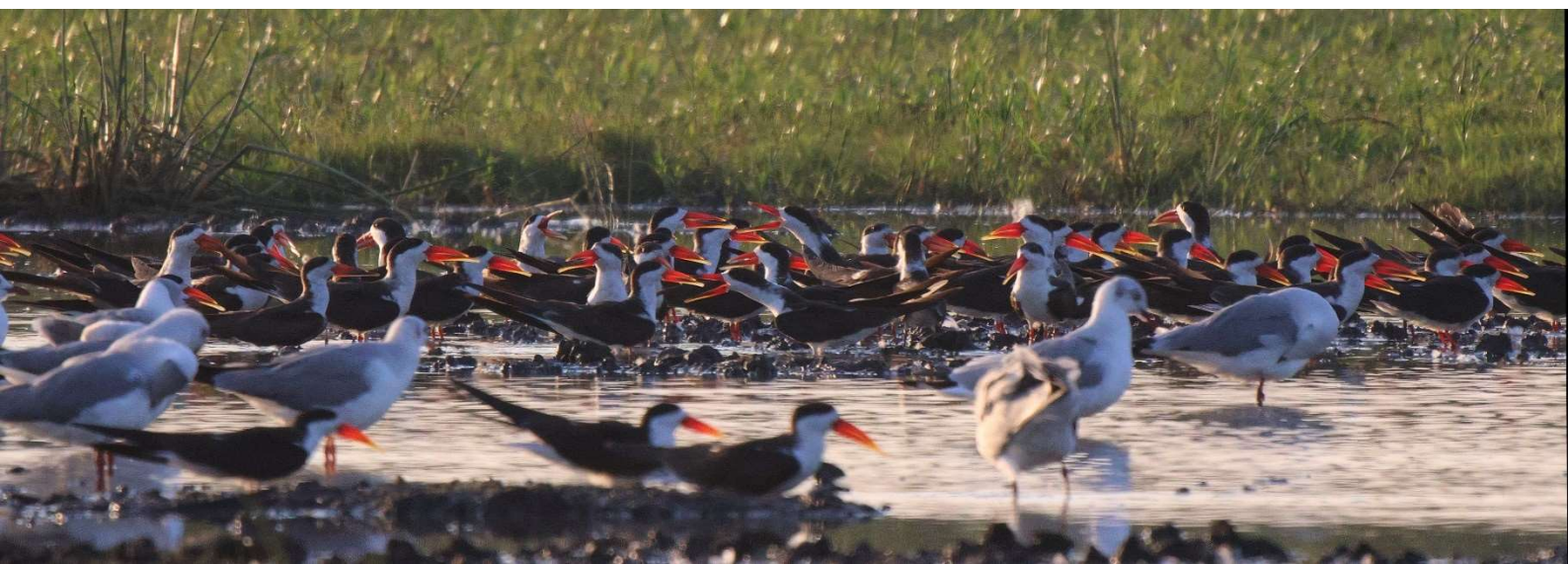
Lochinvar National Park

Lochinvar is part of the Kafue Flats, a million hectares floodplains area, not far short of the size of the Okavango Delta and Bangweulu Wetlands. It can be argued to be Zambia's prime birding site. Against a background of stunning scenery dotted with the endemic Kafue Lechwe, it holds a remarkable diversity in waterbirds, many of which in internationally important congregations. Most notable are the large populations of Grey Crowned and Wattled Crane and (seasonally) African Skimmer and Caspian Plover. Slaty Egret occurs in good numbers and presumably breeds. It is the only site in Zambia where Black-tailed Godwit, Caspian Tern and Gull-billed Tern are present in numbers while Greater Flamingo is regular. The many thousands of migrant waders and terns commonly include vagrants. The adjacent drier shrubs are excellent for warblers including seasonally Olive-tree Warbler (Zambia's only known reliable location) while the drier plains hold breeding populations of Secretarybird, Denham's Bustard and (seasonally) large numbers of Yellow-throated Sandgrouse. Among numerous raptors are Montagu's and Pallid Harrier (seasonal), Red-necked Falcon and all vultures (resident). Kafue Lechwe will be seen in good numbers, while Serval and Oribi are among other mammals of interest which may be seen.

Since 2020, Lochinvar has reinforced its status as Zambia's prime rarity spot producing Zambia's first Little Terns (with 1-3 individuals seen during most summer visits in 2020-2024) as well as for instance Lesser Sand, Pacific Golden and Grey Plover, Pectoral and Terek Sandpiper, Curlew, Whimbrel, Bar-tailed Godwit, Cape Teal, Cape Shoveler (suspected to have bred), Baillon's Crake, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-winged Pratincole and Red-rumped Swallow.

Early December is prime season for waders. Similarly timed visits have yielded up to a remarkable 31 wader species and large numbers of plains species such as Yellow-throated Sandgrouse. Access tends to still be straight-forward this time of year and visibility of waterbirds optimal in the short shoreline vegetation.

Birding Zambia is proud to be the only operator offering packages to Lochinvar. We will pick a camping site next to the shore of Chunga Lagoon, probably not far from Melindi Tree, which forms the prime birding area. Exact locality depends on water levels and hence birding concentrations.



Zambia's endemics: Black-cheeked Lovebird and Zambian (Chaplin's) Barbet

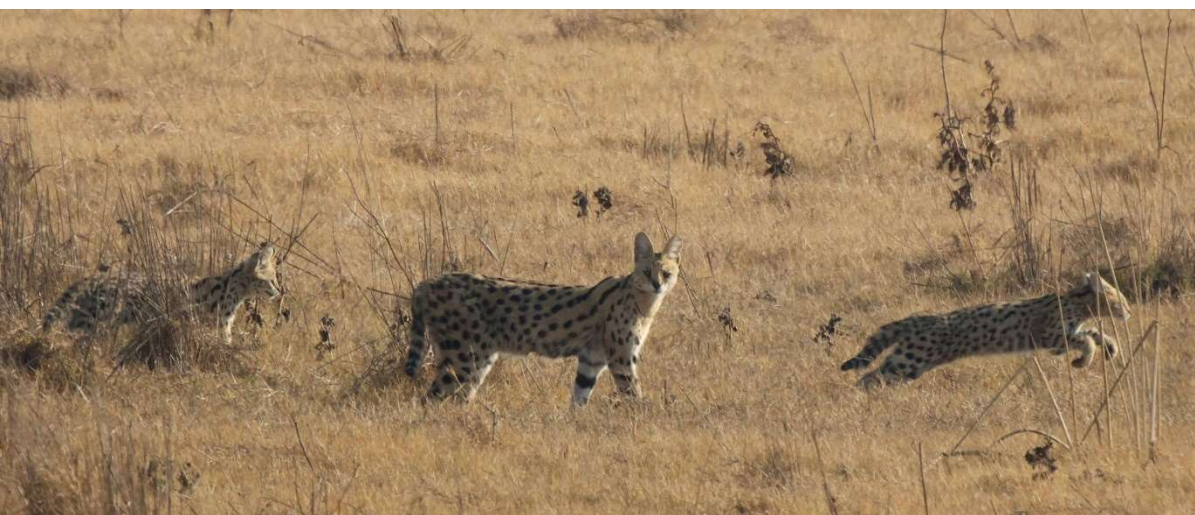


From Lochinvar, we will travel to the nearby vast Kafue National Park. Our base will be at Lake Itzhi-tezhi from where we will explore the attractive southern section in search of the rare and highly localised Black-cheeked Lovebird, one of Zambia's two endemic species. The tiny global range of this tiny parrot ranges from near Kazangula in the southwest, to southern Kafue in the northeast – some 150 km from tip to tip only, with old reports from adjacent Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe now all believed to originate from birds that escaped the cagebird trade. The chances of finding this stunning little bird are excellent. We hope to spend time observing and photographing them at the pools they favour to drink from.

The endlessly varied birdlife in this area ranges from plains species like Secretarybird to thicket species like Southern Crested Guineafowl. Vultures and other raptors abound. A few Kalahari specials are at their limit here, such as Violet-eared Waxbill and Meves's Starling. The Nanzhila Stream hosts species like Finfoot, Half-collared Kingfisher and Lesser Jacana. Lake Itzhi-tezhi hosts a wealth of waterbirds while large mammals are frequently seen on the shores.

The large mammal diversity is impressive. Kafue boasts to have the highest diversity of antelopes in the world. Puku, Impala and Waterbuck are numerous. Plains species such as Roan, Lichtenstein's Hartebeest and Wildebeest may be encountered in excellent numbers. Serval, Wild Dog and Lion occur in great densities while Cheetah is also regularly seen.

From Kafue, we will move on to the Choma area, one of the best known sites for the Zambian (Chaplin's) Barbet. Multiple family groups occur in the attractive and well-managed Nkanga River Conservation Area. In addition, we will try our luck for Zambian miombo specials like Shelley's Sunbird, Miombo Pied Barbet, Racket-tailed Roller, Spotted Creeper, Arnot's Chat and Cabanis's Bunting. A wealth of wildlife including Serval also occurs. Choma also hosts a great wildlife spectacle in January-March, with up to some 50,000 Amur Falcon and smaller numbers of Red-footed Falcon and Lesser Kestrel roosting in a single tree. Although still early in the season, we expect to see all 3 species.



Elusive jewel: African Pitta

The last section of this package focuses on the Lower Zambezi area, a stronghold for African Pitta. This elusive jewel is among Africa's most sought-after species. Zambia is one of few countries to hold significant breeding numbers of this intra-African migrant. Breeding is confirmed mainly in the Sumbu thickets in the far north (Mweru Wantipa and Tanganyika), the lower half of the Luangwa Valley and the lower Zambezi Valley from Lake Kariba downstream. The birds arrive here in late November or early December, at the onset of the rains. Calling and display activity are high during the first few weeks after arrival, giving good chances to locate the species. Once they start breeding and fall silent, the chances of finding them in their favoured dense thickets become slim. This Pitta tour is therefore timed during the peak activity period in the middle of December.



The area around Gwabi Lodge has proven reliable in recent years and is easily accessible, even in case of heavy rains. It is also close to the Little Chongwe River system where we discovered a significant breeding population during our 2020 Birding Zambia Pitta tour. The area further hosts excellent populations of other characteristic thicket species such as Eastern Nicator, Livingstone's Flycatcher, Southern Crested Guinea fowl, Crested Francolin, Purple-crested Turaco and Narina Trogon.

We will focus on finding African Pitta and other thicket specials in the mornings. Hopefully this will include one or two of the more difficult specials, notably Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo or Green Malkoha, as well as a range of migrant warblers such as Thrush Nightingale and with luck River Warbler. During one afternoon, we will explore the Kafue-Zambezi confluence area. This area seems of intriguing ornithological importance. Africa's only known Oriental Cuckoo was collected here in 1897. In 2021, several sightings of Eleonora's Falcon suggest the possibility of a small non-breeding population. Mottled Spinetail, Slaty Egret, Greater Sand Plover and African Skimmer are among the many other species of interest recorded in the area.



Itinerary

Details may vary according to weather conditions.

Day 1: Friday

Transfer from Lusaka to Lochinvar which takes approximately 5 hours. Birding along the way and in Lochinvar in the afternoon.

Day 2: Saturday

We will focus on the shores of the Chunga Lagoon. This is where most waders and other waterbirds concentrate. The sections along the southern parts are most productive, with exact locations of concentrations depending on water levels.

In the afternoon, we might venture further afield into the plains to the northeast, which is a mixture of dry and wet floodplains holding great wader numbers as well as cranes, Denham's & Black-bellied Bustard and Marsh Owl. Return in the dark is likely to yield Three-banded Courser and Serval.

Day 3: Sunday

After an early morning waterbird session around camp, we will make our way to the Banda and Gwisho Hotsprings area. The plains here frequently hold large numbers of cranes and Yellow-throated Sandgrouse. Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Red-necked Falcon and Southern Ground Hornbill are often seen.

We will continue via Namwala to the Itezhi-tezhi area, a 5-hour drive through fascinating landscapes with often excellent birding. Arrival at Itezhi-tezhi in time for a sundowner overlooking the lake.



Day 4: Monday

Full day in the Kafue National Park. We will combine the wildlife-rich shores of the lake with the drier Nanzhila area in search of Black-cheeked Lovebird.

Day 5: Tuesday

Depending on findings the previous day, we will dedicate the morning to the lovebirds, or to more general birding and wildlife viewing closer to camp. Afternoon transfer to Choma, a 5-hour drive.

Day 6: Wednesday

Full day in the Nkanga River Conservation area in search of Zambian (Chaplin's) Barbet. In addition, we will search the local dams for the likes of Rufous-bellied Heron, White-backed Duck and Lesser Jacana, and the miombo woodlands for specials like Spotted Creeper, Racket-tailed Roller, Cabanis's Bunting and Souza Shrike.

Day 7: Thursday

Morning birding around Mambushi Lodge. This is a top location for Shelley's Sunbird. Miombo Pied Barbet, Western Miombo Sunbird and White-backed Duck are among the many specials here.

Afternoon transfer to Gwabi River Lodge, a fascinating 5-hour drive.

Day 8: Friday

The morning is dedicated to finding African Pitta and other specials around Gwabi Lodge. After lunch, we will do a boat ride towards the Kafue-Zambezi confluence to search for Eleonora's Falcon and other species of interest.

Day 9: Saturday

Another full day to look for African Pitta and other specials. If road conditions are good (dry), we may opt for a full day drive to the wildlife area closest to the Lower Zambezi National Park, where several pairs of Pitta occur and large mammals are frequently seen.

Day 10: Sunday

Depending on preferences and results during previous days, we will search again for African Pitta in the morning. Additionally / alternatively, we may head to the Mutulanganga area, an Important Bird Area among others for African Pitta. Afternoon transfer to Lusaka (4 hours).

Day 11 Monday

Early morning birding at Lazy J Bird Sanctuary, Lusaka's top location for miombo birds. Transfer to Lusaka Airport depending on flight times.



Package price

11-day package, fully inclusive including transport from/to Lusaka.

Zambian / African citizens / residents \$3,499

International \$4,375

Single supplement 20%

Included are all guiding services, catering, tea & coffee, accommodation. Excluded are park fees (approximately \$8/44/60 for citizen/resident/international), drinks and items of a personal nature. The rate applies to BirdWatch Zambia members only. Non-members pay an additional \$25 with which comes BWZ membership. For each booking, donations will be made to BirdWatch Zambia and the Mwinilunga Conservation Project.