

The Bangweulu Circuit

May/June 2025

Mutinondo Wilderness,
Lavushi Manda, Bangweulu Wetlands
and Kasanka National Park



Dates:

- Join self-drive from Saturday 31 May to Sunday 8 June 2025
- Collection from airport / Lusaka on Friday 30 May, drop-off Monday 9 June 2025

Guides: One or two of our expert birding guides (Frank Willems, Wouter van Spijker and Leslie Reynolds)

Number of people: minimum 3, maximum 12

Package type: Birds & Bush guided safari: *We're spending our time in wild places, where the focus is on birding while exploring, with ample attention for other wildlife such as mammals, reptiles and amphibians.*

Accommodation type: Mobile lodging (3-star)



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Introduction

The Bangweulu area is among Africa's major protected area complexes with a combined surface of some 2 million hectares. It incorporates the vast Bangweulu Wetlands – one of Africa's largest wetlands - and other ecological jewels like Kasanka and Lavushi Manda National Parks. We will combine a visit to these areas with the nearby well-known private reserve Mutinondo Wilderness. The combined area holds an impressive biodiversity, with well over 500 bird species, some 100 reptiles and 150 mammals recorded. Shoebill is arguably the most iconic bird species found here, combined with a wealth of Zambezian specials like Katanga Masked Weaver, Anchieta's Sunbird, Black-necked Eremomela, Bar-winged Weaver, Pel's Fishing Owl and Wattled Crane, to name just a few. Among many endemics are multiple mammals, at least one reptile and one frog. Our journey will go through an amazingly diverse landscape, from bare rock formations and dense forest, to endless open plains and papyrus-flanked water courses.

This trip is perfect for both birders and nature enthusiasts, with the spectacular landscapes and diversity in large mammals forming a marvellous addition to an impressive bird list. Although birds are a prime focus, we will dedicate ample time to other aspects of these amazing areas as well.

Our Birding Zambia team has an incredible knowledge of the area, with all of our team members having travelled the area extensively or even having been resident ecologists here.

Your visit will support BirdWatch Zambia as well as the Mwinilunga Conservation Initiative, Birding Zambia's conservation project of choice.



Site descriptions

Mutinondo Wilderness

This 10,600-hectares private reserve is possibly Zambia's most scenic destination. Massive granite inselbergs tower out above the pristine miombo woodlands, interspersed with crystal-clear streams, orchid-rich *dambo* grasslands and strips of evergreen forest. Mutinondo, recognized as an Important Bird Area, holds a particularly long list of Zambezian specials. It was here that ornithologists first realized the co-occurrence of two species of Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, now known as Western and Eastern Miombo Sunbird. Anchieta's and Green-headed Sunbird, Ross's Turaco, Grass Owl, Bar-winged Weaver, Laura's Woodland Warbler, White-tailed Elminia, White-tailed Blue Flycatcher, Rufous-bellied Tit, Anchieta's and Whyte's Barbet, Marsh Widow, Bar-throated Apalis, Fawn-breasted Waxbill and Reichard's Seedeater are among the many other specials present.



Although mammal densities are relatively low compared to some of Africa's national parks, the diversity is high, with interesting species like Chequered Giant Sengi, Spotted-necked and Clawless Otter, Klipspringer, Roan, Sable, Eland and Spotted Hyena all having been recorded during birding trips.

Among the rich reptile and amphibian fauna is the fascinating endemic Mutinondo Grass Frog which Frank recently described from the reserve, living on the granite inselbergs. June isn't a great time to find these but we just might get lucky.

We will stay at the scenic Nsaka Campsite using our comfortable mobile camp. Please enquire if you're keen to opt for Mutinondo's stunning chalets instead.



Lavushi Manda National Park

This 160,000 hectare wilderness holds fascinating scenery and biodiversity, including a huge diversity of larger mammals. We will traverse the park on the way to Bangweulu, following the main road cutting through a dry section of the park. Although our brief snapshot won't do this rich park any justice, we expect nevertheless to come across a range of interesting birds.

The miombo that flanks the main road can be very productive. During previous Birding Zambia tours, we picked up on, among others, Arnot's Chat, Anchieta's Barbet, Black-necked Eremomela, Spotted Creeper, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Long-tailed Cisticola and a wealth of raptors.

We will have a lunch stop at Mumbatuta Falls on the Lukulu River. This pretty set of small falls regularly produces interesting birds including Finfoot, Black Duck, Mountain Wagtail, Ross's Turaco and Palm-nut Vulture. Vanilla Orchid is among fascinating flora associated with the falls. A range of large mammals has been encountered here over the years here as well – though luck is required.





Bangweulu Wetlands

With a surface of some 1.5 million hectares, this is one of Africa’s largest wetlands. The area is best known for the large population of Shoebills and the endemic Black Lechwe. It can further boast to hold another endemic (sub)species of antelope, the Bangweulu Tsessebe, some 15% of the global population of Wattled Crane, healthy populations of vultures, Sitatunga and Oribi, as well as enormous numbers of waterbirds. You’ll hardly have a second without seeing birds! Among many specials are Katanga Masked Weaver, Lesser Jacana, Swamp Flycatcher, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Black Heron, Spur-winged and Long-toed Lapwing and Rosy-throated Longclaw. We expect to see thousands of ducks, egrets, ibises, spoonbills, pelicans and other waterbirds, as well as a great diversity and density of raptors, while exploring the myriad of river channels dotted with Papyrus and waterlilies.



Our key target is the iconic and threatened Shoebill. Local expertise on the whereabouts of the birds will dictate which area(s) we will focus on during a dedicated “Shoebill Expedition”. This typically involves a boat ride by banana boat, and may require walking through wet areas and even over floating vegetation.



We will stay at Nsoke Community Campsite, making use of Birding Zambia’s comfortable mobile camp, at the very edge of the vast Chimbwi Plains. Large numbers of Black Lechwe and smaller numbers of Tsessebe are commonly seen from the camp. Collared Pratincole and Kittlitz’s Plover are among birds occurring in large numbers here, while finding specials like Denham’s Bustard may require more effort. The adjacent termitaria woodlands host beauties like Black-backed Barbet and White-winged Black Tit, while the rain-fed plains slightly further south hold jewels like Blue Quail, Black-rumped Buttonquail, Locust Finch and Fülleborn’s Longclaw, plus isolated populations of Long-tailed Widow, Desert Cisticola, Sooty Chat and Rufous-naped Lark. Oribi and Reedbuck are among the ungulates in these parts. Carnivores regularly encountered include Spotted Hyena and Side-striped Jackal. Cheetah was reintroduced to the area in 2021 and may be seen hunting on the plains.



Kasanka National Park

Despite being one of Zambia’s smaller national parks, Kasanka is renowned for its biodiversity and rich mosaic of dry and wet habitats. The world-famous migration of some 10 million Straw-coloured Fruit Bats, which occurs between early October and early January, may well be the largest mammal concentration on earth and is frequently stated to be among the world’s greatest wildlife spectacles.

With 480 bird species recorded, it has the longest birdlist of all Zambian parks and Important Bird Areas apart from the massive Kafue N.P. – remarkable considering the relatively small size and lack of real variation in elevation. Among the many specials commonly seen are Böhm’s Bee-eater, Ross’s Turaco, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, a wide range of waterbirds including the occasional Shoebill, and many miombo woodland specials such as Black-necked Eremomela, Rufous-bellied Tit and Yellow-bellied Hyliota.

The ever-growing mammal list stands at some 130 species. This park offers possibly the world’s best Sitatunga viewing and a large population of Puku, while we are likely to see specials like Rump-spotted (“Blue”) Monkey and Kinda Baboon in addition to megafauna such as Elephant and Hippopotamus.



Detailed program

Day 1: Friday 30 May

Collection of participants from Lusaka International Airport or elsewhere in Lusaka. Time-dependent, we will be birding along the road to Chisamba, including a reliable site for the endemic Chaplin's Barbet. Overnight in Birding Zambia's private guesthouse (4 rooms – on a first-come basis) or Fringilla Lodge.



Self-drive participants are welcome to join on this day, but may also opt to join on the Saturday.

Day 2: Saturday 31 May

Early start (5:00) from Chisamba. It takes approximately 10 hours to reach Mutinondo Wilderness, including some brief scheduled stops along the way. Coffee will be at Fig Tree Café, lunch will be at Forest Inn. Time allowing, we will tie in some roadside stops expecting to see a good mixture of typical Zambian birds to warm up with.

Self-drive participants coming from e.g. Copperbelt may want to join up at Forest Inn late morning.

Arrival at Mutinondo Wilderness late afternoon, where we will set up camp on the scenic campsites.

Day 3 and 4: Sunday 1 and Monday 2 June

Two full days of exploring Mutinondo Wilderness. We will get an excellent impression of the wide variety of habitats and accompanying birds, including the streams and rapids, miombo woodlands, wet evergreen forest, open dambo grasslands and rocky habitats. Not only does the area offer great birding, but also the choice between walking and driving, and even canoeing and swimming – all great ways to enjoy the wilderness. And not to forget the many sites for unforgettable birding-and-sundowner combo's!

Day 5: Tuesday 3 June

We'll aim for a timely start from Mutinondo, heading towards Lavushi Manda N.P. It will take 3-4 hours from Mutinondo to Mumbatuta Falls, depending on bird activity along the way. We'll have a couple of hours to enjoy the rapids, birds and a lunch at Mumbatuta. Another 3 hours on dusty



roads will be needed to reach Nsobe Campsite in the Bangweulu Wetlands, where we'll use the rest of the afternoon to set up camp and enjoy the bird and mammal rich surroundings.



Day 6 and 7: Wednesday 4 and Thursday 5 June

Two full days to explore the Bangweulu Wetlands. We'll incorporate a "Shoebill Expedition", an additional birding session by boat, and several drives and (optionally) walks to ensure we cover all major birding and wildlife habitats in the area.

Day 8: Friday 6 June

Early morning birding and breakfast around Nsobe Campsite, after which we embark on our 6-hour journey to Kasanka National Park. Along the way we will stop at the scenic Lake Waka Waka for lunch. We expect to check in at Pontoon Campsite in good time to settle in and do some birding.

Day 9: Saturday 7 June

Full day to explore Kasanka. We will do our best to get a good impression of all that this park has on offer within our relatively limited time here. Pontoon is the best area to see the secretive Sitatunga, at first light, while a long list of bird specials are often seen here, including Pel's Fishing Owl and Böhm's Bee-eater. From here, we will continue to explore the Kasanka Floodplains and adjacent woodlands, up to Bufumu Forest – an amazing jewel including Zambia's tallest known tree and the magical *mateshe* dry evergreen forest – where we will have lunch. The afternoon drive passes by the Bat Forest – home to the world famous colony of Straw-coloured Fruit Bats in Oct-Dec, as well as resident groups of Kinda Baboon, Rump-spotted ("Blue") Monkey and Malbrouck's Monkey, and a wide range of birds.



Day 10: Sunday 8 June

After an early breakfast, we will make our way back towards the gate, with likely some excellent birds as we go. It is approximately 7 hours (500 km) from the entrance gate to Lusaka, or some 6 hours to Ndola and Kitwe.

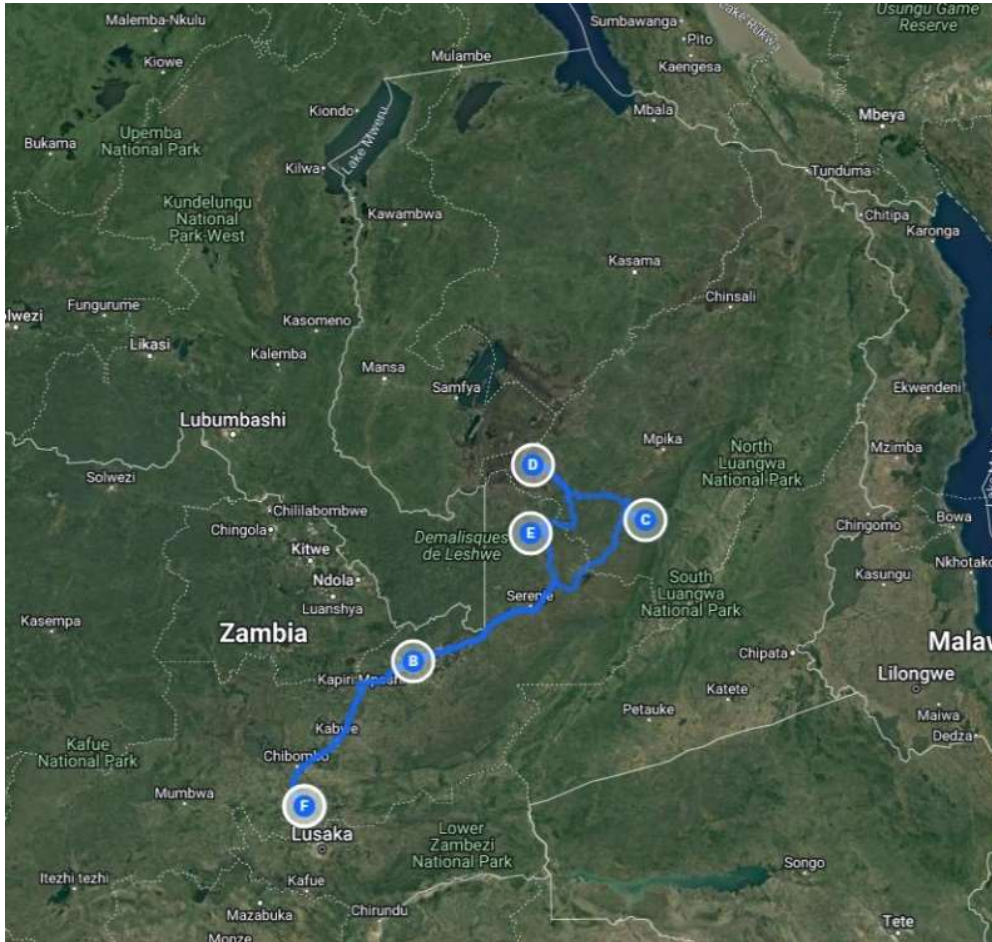
For fly-in visitors, your overnight will be at Birding Zambia's private cottage or Fringilla Lodge.

Day 11: Monday 9 June

Early morning transfer to the airport.



Map of the route



Map of the route, starting from and ending at Chisamba, 40 km north of Lusaka city / airport

- A: Birding Zambia / Fringilla Lodge
- B: Forest Inn
- C: Mutinondo Wilderness
- D: Nsoke Campsite – Bangweulu Wetlands
- E: Kasanka National Park

The roundtrip to and from Lusaka is approximately 1450 km – excluding movements within the reserves.

Package price

(1) Self-drive - Meet on 1st June at Mutinondo / depart 9th June from Kasanka

- Fully inclusive: Inclusive of guiding, accommodation, catering, entry fees, activities
Resident / SADC \$ 2,385 pp (sharing)
International \$ 2,981 pp (sharing)
- Fully inclusive with own camping gear: Inclusive of guiding, catering, entry fees, activities
Resident / SADC \$ 2,265 pp (sharing)
International \$ 2,831 pp (sharing)

(2) Fly in - Pickup from airport on Friday 30 May, night in Chisamba / depart Monday 9 June after night in Chisamba from airport. Comfortable transport 4x4 whole trip

- Fully inclusive with transport: Inclusive of guiding, accommodation, catering, entry fees, activities, transport
Resident / SADC \$ 3,225 pp (sharing)
International \$ 4,031 pp (sharing)

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.

