

Pitta tour December 2023



Dates: Sunday 17 – Wednesday 20 (4 days / 3 nights)

Guide: Frank Willems

Accommodation type: lodging (3-star) at Gwabi Lodge

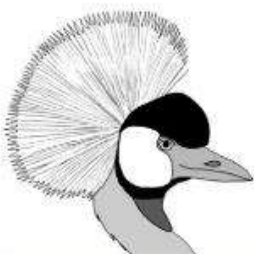
Participants: minimum 4, maximum flexible

Package price: \$539 (chalet) / \$413 (campsite room) on sharing basis.

The package includes searches for Pitta and other birds by vehicle and on foot, plus a boat ride in the Kafue-Zambezi confluence area. Included in the costs are all guiding services and accommodation. Excluded are catering (breakfast is included in the chalet rate) and drinks which are available from Gwabi Lodge. Single supplement \$198 for chalet / \$72 for campsite room. Transport to/from Lusaka can be arranged.

Rates apply to BirdWatch Zambia members only. Non-members pay an additional \$25 with which comes BWZ membership for 2024. For each booking, a donation will be made to BirdWatch Zambia.

Please enquire if you would like to extend the tour, for instance to include the endemic Zambian (Chaplin's) Barbet and other specials of the Chisamba area.



Birding Zambia

Web www.birdingzambia.com - email birdingzambia@gmail.com

Introduction

The Pitta is among Africa's most sought-after species. Zambia is one of few countries to hold significant breeding numbers of this elusive intra-African migrant. Breeding is confirmed mainly in the Sumbu thickets in the far north (Mweru Wantipa and Tanganyika), the Luangwa Valley and the 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 mid-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 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 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. During two afternoons, 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 and African Skimmer are among the many other species of interest recorded in the area.





Itinerary

The below description outlines the envisioned itinerary. Weather conditions, notably rains, may influence the exact planning.

Sunday 17 December

14:00 arrival at Gwabi Lodge. After settling in, we will do a late afternoon walk on the Gwabi property.

Monday 18 December

The morning is dedicated to finding Pitta and other specials around Gwabi Lodge. After lunch, we will drive towards the Kafue-Zambezi confluence to

search for Eleonora's Falcon and other species of interest.

Tuesday 19 December

The Little Chongwe River will be visited in the morning where we will search for Pitta. After lunch, we will do a boat ride to the Kafue-Zambezi confluence area. Megafauna such as Hippo and Buffalo may be encountered, in addition to the rich birdlife.

Wednesday 20 December

Depending on preferences and results during previous days, we will search again for Pitta in the morning. Additionally, / alternatively, we may head to either the Mutulunganga area, an Important Bird Area among others for Pitta.

What to expect and what to bring

December typically is hot and humid in the Zambezi Valley, with occasional heavy rain which might take us by surprise. We anticipate some walking through muddy conditions. Please ensure to bring a raincoat and a sweater, foot wear suitable for wet conditions, waterproof packaging for cameras, a sun hat and sunblock.

Route description

Gwabi Lodge is easily found on Google Maps. From Chirundu, you turn east onto the road towards Chiawa / Lower Zambezi National Park. The turnoff to the lodge is well signposted. The drive from Lusaka takes approximately 3 hours, traffic depending.

Please be advised that the road from Leopards Hill to Chiawa is rough at best of times, and becomes impassable once the rains start.

