

Mwinilunga & Ikelenge

October 2024



Dates: From Lusaka: Fri 4 October – Mon 14 October (10 nights / 11 days)
Optional, from Solwezi / Kalumbila: Sat 5 October – Sun 13 October (8 nights / 9 days)

Guides: Frank Willems and/or Leslie Reynolds

Number of people: minimum 2, maximum 12

Package type: Birds & Bush guided safari: We're spending as much time as feasible in wild places, where the focus is on birding while exploring, with ample attention for other wildlife.

Accommodation type: mix of lodging and mobile camp (3-star)



**BIRDING
ZAMBIA**

Introduction: Mwinilunga, where Congo meets Kalahari

Among birders and ecologists, Mwinilunga needs little introduction. The extreme northwest of Zambia, now split into Mwinilunga and Ikelenge Districts, bordering both Angola and the DR Congo, holds amazing biodiversity against a stunningly scenic background. Zambia's largest rainforests are set in vast grassy plains on Kalahari sands, while other sections are covered with scenic *miombo* woodlands and *mavunda* forest. Within Zambia, tens of bird species are found only in this area. Several are endemic to Mwinilunga and adjacent parts of Angola and DRC, such as Grimwood's Longclaw, Dambo Cisticola and Bocage's Weaver. Others are typical for the lowland forests of Central Africa, such as Spot-breasted Ibis and Afep Pigeon, or the grasslands from Gabon to Mwinilunga, such as Black-collared Bulbul, while yet other species are typical of Africa's montane areas, such as Wing-snapping Cisticola and Red-throated Wryneck. We expect to see most of these "Mwinilunga specials" including some of the many exciting recent discoveries. All this is in addition to the rich Zambezian avifauna of Zambia's *miombo* woodlands and *dambo* grasslands, which is also well represented in Mwinilunga.

Palm Civet, Dwarf Galago, White-bellied Tree Pangolin, Giant Otter Shrew, Brush-tailed Porcupine and the recently discovered African Giant Squirrel are just a few of the extraordinary tropical mammals hiding in the plains and forests. Lots of regional endemics occur, such as the Sakeji Horseshoe Bat and Katanga Bush Viper.

This far-flung corner remains very remote. Birding Zambia offers a unique package, hoping to stimulate birders and nature enthusiasts to explore the area. Your guides, Frank Willems and Leslie Reynolds, have extensively explored this area, resulting in the discovery of birds and reptiles new to Zambia. The focus will be on sharing the magic of the recently discovered jewel Nyachisala Forest, which forms Zambia's largest rainforest, as well as the traditional sites Chitunta Plain, Source of the Zambezi and Zambezi Rapids, and reaching into the extreme tip of the country, Jimbe Drainage. We stay overnight in truly remote wilderness areas, though whilst lodging in style. Although the focus is on birds, one doesn't need to be a fanatic to join; there will be ample opportunity to enjoy other wildlife or just enjoy the bush. Your visit will support BirdWatch Zambia as well as the Mwinilunga Conservation Project which Birding Zambia is initiating in partnership with the local community and others.





Detailed program

The designed itinerary starts and ends in Lusaka, with vehicle transfer to/from Mutanda. You are also welcome to join from any other starting point in Zambia on 6th or 7th.

Solwezi is easily reached by the daily ProFlight flights from Lusaka. The transfer to Mutanda Nature Lodge takes 30 minutes. Logical flights are on Friday 4th at 15:00 or Saturday 5th at 6:50. , in time to connect with the group on 7th. Return on Sunday 13th will be in time for the 16:50 Solwezi to Lusaka flight, or alternatively the 8:40 flight on Monday 14th. There are also daily flights from Johannesburg to Ndola.

Day 1: Friday 4 October

Early morning departure from Lusaka. The transfer to Mutanda Nature Lodge crosses the entire Copperbelt. Short stops will be made along the way to check for the likes of Red-throated Cliff Swallow and Angolan Swallow. Accommodation will be in spacious chalets.

Day 2: Saturday 5 October

Early morning birding on the grounds of Mutanda Nature Lodge, which is well-known for tricky species such as Cassin's Flycatcher and Bamboo Warbler, and a great introduction to the birding ahead! Zambian specials we may not see elsewhere during this trip include Bocage's Akalat, Grey-olive Greenbul, Olive Woodpecker, Half-collared Kingfisher, Black-faced Canary and Spotted Creeper.

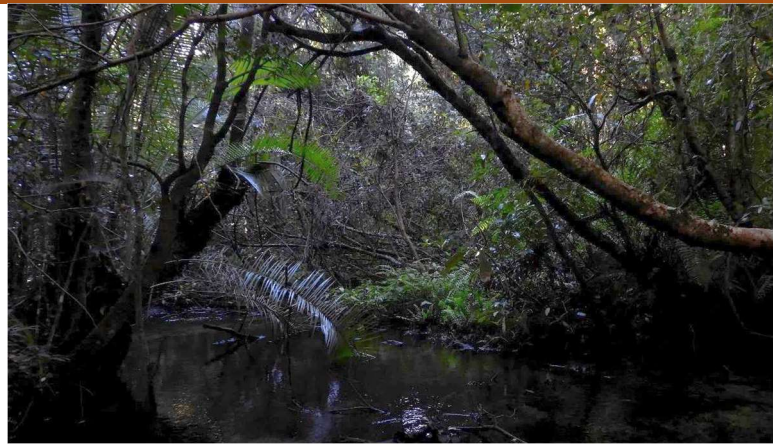
After breakfast, you will drive to Nyachisala Bushcamp, a journey of approximately 10 hours including birding stops and poor road stretches along the way. The tarmac road crosses Kabompo River, a well-known site for Red-throated Cliff Swallow, Mountain Wagtail, Bamboo Warbler and Bocage's Akalat. Shortly after, you leave the tarmac onto the long dirt road to Kakoma. You will spend time at the fascinating Mufundu Plain, one of the best places to see a wealth of Mwinilunga's grassland specials such as Grimwood's Longclaw, Angola Lark, Black-and-Rufous Swallow, Locustfinch and Short-tailed Pipit. The site proves a magnet for local rarities, which have already included Rock Kestrel, Black-winged Pratincole, White-fronted Plover, Whinchat and both Greater Striped and South African Cliff Swallow. Miombo woodlands along this stretch can be unpredictable but host jewels like Black-necked Eremomela, Anchieta's Sunbird, Anchieta's Barbet, Miombo Rock Thrush and Böhm's Flycatcher.



From Mufundu, it is another 3 hours driving to reach Nyachisala, a slow but interesting drive.

Day 3 and 4: Sunday 6 – Monday 7 October

Two full days in the Nyachisala area, a highly diverse and scenic area only known to the ornithological world since 2017. This is the site where Spot-breasted Ibis was first found in Zambia in 2017. It is now known to hold almost all of the “Mwinilunga specials”, most of which in great densities, including a healthy population of Vermiculated Fishing Owl



Our seasonal Nyachisala Bushcamp is operated by Birding Zambia. It overlooks the upper West-Lunga River. The river is crystal clear here, meandering through Zambia’s largest rainforest over white sands, dotted with waterlilies.

Possibly our prime target is Vermiculated Fishing-owl, which we will try for after dusk and before dawn. Although sightings are not guaranteed, we have managed great visuals and images during our 2023 visits (including the images on cover and below). We hope to glimpse Spot-breasted Ibis passing by at dawn or dusk, or – with great luck – flush it during the day.

We will further try the extensive rainforests for Spotted Thrush Babbler, Least, Pallid and Scaly-throated Honeyguide, White-spotted Flufftail, Blue Malkoha, Afep, Olive and Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, Tambourine and Lemon Dove, Shining-blue, Blue-breasted and the elusive White-bellied Kingfisher, Buff-throated and Brown-headed Apalis, Laura’s Woodland Warbler, Bates’s and Bannerman’s Sunbird, Rufous Flycatcher Thrush, Brown-eared Woodpecker, Splendid Starling and Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, while the forest edges may produce Bamboo Warbler, Black-faced canary, Black-bellied Seedcracker and White-chinned Prinia.

We will work the plains in search of Grimwood’s, Fülleborn’s and Rosy-throated Longclaw, Black-collared Bulbul, Compact Weaver, Blue Quail, Locust Finch, Black-chinned Quailfinch, a wealth of cisticolas (notably Pale-crowned, Levillant’s, Stout and Chirping), Black-and-rufous Swallow, Red-chested Flufftail and much more.





Nyachisala also holds a wealth of other interesting fauna and flora. We might hear the calls of a yet to be identified Dwarf Galago at night, as well as various amphibians of interest. Lord Derby's Anomalure is among the secretive mammals that has been seen from camp. Katanga Bush Viper, Dewitte's Five-toed Skink, Iven's Skink, African Tree Lizard and Heenen's Dwarf Gecko are just a few of the many fascinating reptiles that we have found.

Day 5: Tuesday 8 October

Early morning optional birding at Nyachisala. After this, we will traverse a fascinating mosaic of plains and woodlands on our way to Mwinilunga town. We may try for Bar-winged Weaver at the scenic Lake Chibesha.

Our accommodation will be Kwakuwahi Lodge in Mwinilunga Town, a pleasant lodge on the West-Lunga River. Although principally an overnight stay, it holds a number of interesting birds.



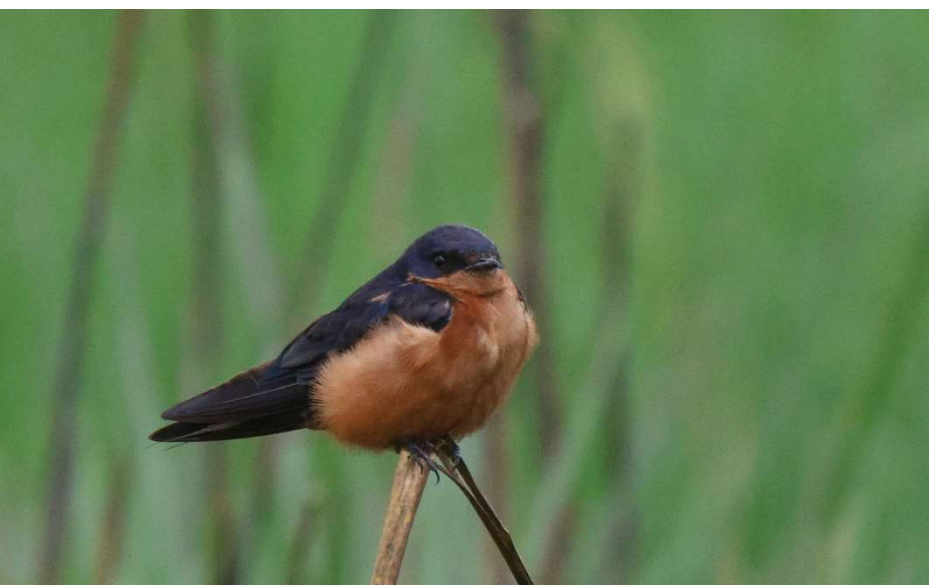
Day 6: Wednesday 9 October

The morning will be dedicated to Chitunta Plain. This Important Bird Area is Zambia's only known breeding site for Bocage's Weaver. Other target birds include Dambo Cisticola, Grimwood's Longclaw, Black-rumped Buttonquail and Rufous-throated Wryneck.

We will have lunch at the Source of the Zambezi. This National Monument is not only of significance for its hydrological and symbolic value, but also protects some fine wet evergreen forest and miombo woodland. Grey-winged Robin, Bates's

Sunbird, Red-tailed Bristlebill, Blue Malkoha, Böhm's Flycatcher, Spotted Creeper and Whistling Cisticola are some of the birds regularly encountered here.

From the source, it is another 3 or so hours of increasingly narrow tracks to reach the remote Jimbe Drainage. Another slow though most worthwhile drive, traversing among others fascinating grassland plains and *Marquesia* dominated *mavunda* forest.





Day 7 and 8: Thursday 10 and Friday 11 October

Full days in the Jimbe Drainage. The tall evergreen forests here have a stronger ‘Guineo-Congolian affinity’ than at any other site in Zambia. Our camp is at “Mad Man’s Crossing”, a site that has been famous for years as Zambia’s only known locality for the elusive African Shrike-Flycatcher as well as the stunning Chestnut Wattle-eye. It is at this very site that Frank and Birding Zambia’s Wouter van Spijker discovered Grey-chinned and Blue-throated Brown Sunbirds new to Zambia in 2020. In 2021, Zambia’s first Western Nicators and Forest Hinged Terrapin were discovered during the Birding Zambia tour, while Chapin’s River Frog was added in 2022. Then during our 2023 visits, we added Slender-billed Greenbul, Olive-bellied Sunbird, Collared Snake-eater, Thirteen-scaled Green Snake and even African Giant Squirrel to Zambia’s list! We may just also have found a tiny frog new to science – on which more news hopefully soon.

Other mouth-watering key species here include Green-throated and Orange-tufted Sunbird, Sooty Flycatcher, Red-tailed Bristlebill, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Orange-cheeked Waxbill, plus most of the more widespread Mwinilunga specials such as Brown-eared Woodpecker, White-spotted Flufftail, Bamboo Warbler, Spotted Thrush-babbler, Black-collared Bulbul and Whistling Cisticola. Both Shining-blue and White-bellied Kingfisher are known from the Jimbe Stream, which is home to fascinating *Kneria* fish and a range of Guineo-Congolian small mammals.

Black-bellied Seedcracker occurs in some of the small subsistence gardens, as does a long list of other seedeaters including Red-cheeked Cordon-blue, Dusky Indigobird, Fawn-breasted Waxbill and Red-headed Quelea. Thomas’s Dwarf Galago and Forest Vine Snake are among other “Congo species” we may well see. And we stand a real chance of discovering yet another addition to the Zambian list!



Day 9: Saturday 12 October

This day is also Cornell's (eBird) Global Big Day which we will contribute to.

Early morning in the Jimbe Drainage. From here, we will head for the extensive and scenic Zambezi Rapids, where we hope to find Forbes's Plover (for which this is the only known Zambian breeding site, with October the prime month) and Cassin's Flycatcher. The seepage grasslands hold numerous orchids and rare dragonflies. We will traverse and bird the Chitunta Plain and end at Wina wa Nzambi, just north of Mwinilunga Town. Time depending, we will still bird the premises.



Day 10: Sunday 13 October

Morning birding at Wina wa Nzambi. The scenic old house and lodge overlooks a large and deep sinkhole, surrounded by excellent miombo woodlands. A long list of miombo specials is found here. Notable species include Bar-winged Weaver, Rufous-bellied and Miombo Tit, Spotted Creeper, Souza Shrike, Miombo Wren-warbler, Miombo Rock Thrush, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Black-necked Eremomela, Western Miombo Sunbird, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Red-capped Crombec, Dusky Flycatcher and Pale-billed Hornbill, with chances of a range of honeyguides including Pallid and Scaly-throated. Both Trilling and Whistling Cisticola occur and may be found in mixed groups. Böhm's Spinetail might be seen foraging and displaying above the "crater" or other parts of the property.

After a decent late morning brunch, you will head to Mutanda Nature Lodge, a 4-hour drive.

Day 11: Monday 14 October

Early morning birding within the premises of Mutanda Nature Lodge, followed by breakfast and the return drive (9 hours to Lusaka, or 30 minutes to Solwezi Airport).



Map of the route

Only the sections from and to Mutanda Nature Lodge are indicated.

A: Mutanda Nature Lodge

B: Nyachisala Forest

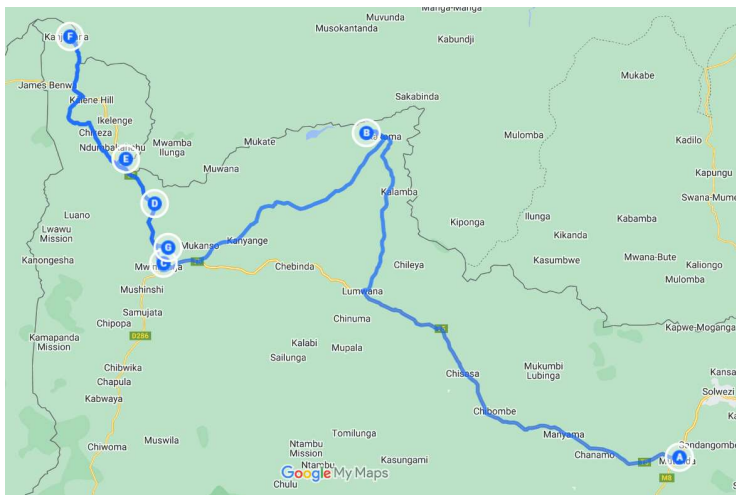
C: Kwakuwahi Lodge, Mwinilunga

D: Chitunta Plain

E: Source of the Zambezi

F: Mad Man's Crossing, Jimbe Drainage

G: Wina wa Nzambi



Package price

10 nights/11 days; please enquire for shorter options

International

Per person: \$2,349 self-drive & own camping gear; \$2,699 fully inclusive self-drive; \$3,379 fully inclusive including transport.

Zambian/SADC residents

Per person: \$1,849 self-drive & own camping gear; \$2,099 fully inclusive self-drive; \$2,699 fully inclusive including transport.

Included are all guiding services, catering, tea & coffee, accommodation. Excluded are drinks (available on request) 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 2024 and 2025. For each booking, donations will be made to BirdWatch Zambia and the Kalwelwa Conservation Project.

Photo credits: Wouter van Spijker / Birding Zambia (Blue-throated and Grey-chinned Sunbird, Slender-billed Greenbul – Mad Man's Crossing, Jimbe), Frank Willems / Birding Zambia (all other images – various sites, Mwinilunga/Ikelenge)

