

# The Bangweulu Circuit

## Sat 20 – Sun 28 May 2023

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



**Guide:** Frank Willems

**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, typically with ample attention for other wildlife such as reptiles and amphibians.*

**Accommodation type:** glamping (3-star)

**Participants:** minimum 2, maximum 12

### Package price

**Option 1: Collection from Lusaka / airport on Friday 19th, drop-off on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> – fully inclusive**

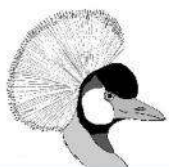
International, per person: \$3,224. Zambian/SADC residents, per person: \$2,599

**Option 2: Self-drive, from any starting point, join on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> up to Sunday 28<sup>th</sup>**

International, per person: \$2,599 all-inclusive / \$2,299 with own camping kit.

Zambian/SADC residents, per person: \$1,849 all-inclusive / \$1,549 with own camping kit.

*Included are all guiding services, catering, tea & coffee, accommodation. Excluded are drinks (available on-site) 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 2023. For each booking, a donation will be made to BirdWatch Zambia and the Mwinilunga Conservation Project.*



# BIRDING ZAMBIA

Web [www.birdingzambia.com](http://www.birdingzambia.com) / email: [birdingzambia@gmail.com](mailto:birdingzambia@gmail.com)

## Introduction

The Bangweulu area is one of Africa's main 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 Park. 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. 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 fanatic birders and other 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.

Your guide, Frank Willems, was the resident ecologist for a decade here, exploring all corners of this vast and diverse landscape.

Your visit will support BirdWatch Zambia as well as the Mwinilunga Conservancy, 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 long list of 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, the diversity is high, with interesting species like Chequered Giant Sengi, both otters, Klipspringer, Roan Antelope, Eland, Spotted Hyena and Leopard.

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. May isn’t a great to find these but we just might get lucky.

We will stay at the scenic Nsaka Campsite using our comfortable mobile kit. 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 the 2022 Birding Zambia tour, we picked up on, among others, Arnot's Chat, Anchieta's Barbet, Black-necked Eremomela, Spotted Creeper, Yellow-bellied Hyliota and Long-tailed Cisticola.

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 as densities are low.



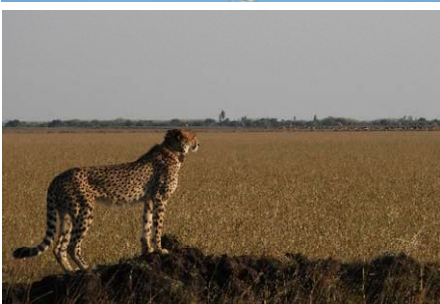
## Bangweulu Wetlands



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 Oribo, 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, 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, to name a few, in and near the river channels dotted with Papyrus and waterlilies.



Our key target obviously 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 Nsobe Community Campsite, making use of Birding Zambia's mobile camp kit, 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 bird occurring in huge 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 specials 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. Oribo 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 Zambia's parks and Important Bird Areas apart from the massive Kafue N.P. – remarkable considering the small size and lack of 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.

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

### *Fri 19 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 (2 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.

### *Sat 20 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 at midday.

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

### *Sun 21 and Mon 22 May*

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!

### *Tue 23 May*

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.



*Wed 24 and Thu 25 May*

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.

*Fri 26 May*

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.

*Sat 27 May*

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.



*Sun 28 May*

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.

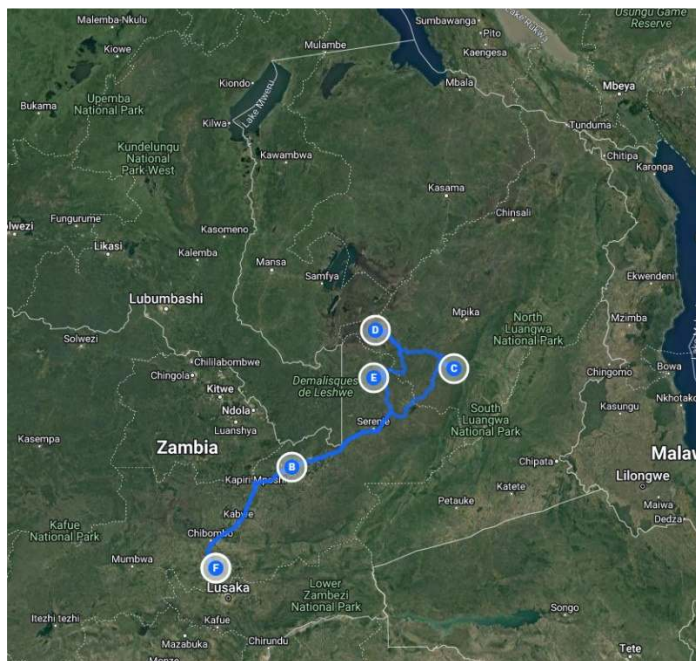
*Mon 29 May*

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: Nsobe Campsite – Bangweulu Wetlands
- E: Kasanka National Park

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

## Suggested flights

If flying from Johannesburg, we suggest the following ProFlight option:

Fri 19 May 12:00 -> 14:00

Mon 29 May 8:00 -> 10:00

