

Frank Willems

Ecologist, Ornithologist, Conservationist and Bird Guide

Frank Willems, originally from the Netherlands, obtained his MSc in Ecology from Nijmegen University before joining the Dutch ornithological research organisation SOVON. His early

professional work focused on the breeding ecology and population dynamics of birds in the Netherlands. Through the Foundation WIWO, he also became involved in bird research and training projects in Russia and Iran.



Zambia: A New Chapter

In early 2008, Frank and his wife Inge moved to Zambia to work with Kasanka Trust on the management of Kasanka National Park, Lavushi Manda National Park and Shoebill Island Camp in the Bangweulu Wetlands.

His work during this period was remarkably diverse and included:

- Mammal and bird monitoring
- Supervising PhD studies on species such as Shoebill, Kinda Baboon and Straw-coloured Fruit Bat
- Supporting film crews and documentary productions
- Writing management plans
- Anti-poaching activities
- Construction of scout camps and bridges
- Fire management and firebreak creation
- Road maintenance and infrastructure development

Lavushi Manda National Park was virtually unexplored prior to the Trust's involvement, and Frank contributed significantly to expanding scientific knowledge of the area.

He is particularly proud of assisting African Parks in Bangweulu to expose and substantially reduce the illegal trade in Shoebill chicks.

Supporting Major Wildlife Productions

The Bangweulu Shoebills featured prominently in the BBC's acclaimed *Africa* series, alongside Kasanka's spectacular migration of Straw-coloured Fruit Bats — the world's largest mammal migration — and the eagles that prey upon them. Frank played a key role in facilitating these productions.

Mutinondo Wilderness

In 2015, Frank, Inge and their daughter Robin moved to nearby Mutinondo Wilderness to manage the reserve.

One of Frank's personal highlights has been the discovery and subsequent scientific description of the Mutinondo Grass Frog, a species reproducing in seasonal seepage habitats on the dramatic granite inselbergs that dominate the reserve.

Kigelia Solutions and Birding Zambia

Since late 2017, Frank and Inge have been based in Chisamba and operate their own company, Kigelia Solutions.

Major projects have included:

- Development of the *Birds of Zambia* app
- Biodiversity surveys of the Mafinga Mountains
- Natural history film productions featuring species such as African Skimmer, Straw-coloured Fruit Bat, Crowned Eagle and Marabou
- Conservation consultancy work and biodiversity surveys for community conservancies in the Mpumba area
- Comparative studies of Zambia's national park management models

Frank's creation of **Birding Zambia** now sees him travelling extensively throughout Zambia and many other African countries leading birding and natural history tours.



Leadership and Conservation Roles

Alongside his professional work, Frank serves in several important conservation roles, including:

- Zambian Bird Recorder
- Technical Advisor to BirdWatch Zambia
- Chair of the Zambian Bird Data Committee
- Zambia representative for the African Bird Club
- Manager of the African Bird Names Committee

Exploring Mwinilunga and Ikelenge

Many of Frank's personal expeditions have focused on the remote and poorly explored forests of Mwinilunga and Ikelenge Districts.

Evergreen forests identified through satellite imagery and field exploration have yielded remarkable discoveries, including populations of:

- Vermiculated Fishing Owl
- Spot-breasted Ibis

Driven by a desire to safeguard these unique ecosystems, Frank established the **Mwinilunga Conservation Trust**, with the long-term vision of creating a large conservancy to protect the region's exceptional biodiversity.

He also founded and manages Birding Zambia's **Nyachisala** and **Jimbe Bushcamps**, two destinations increasingly recognised for their outstanding birding and herpetological interest.

Guiding and Training

From a young age, Frank has enjoyed guiding and teaching others in the natural world. Over the years he has trained and guided people in the Netherlands, Zambia and many other countries.

In Zambia alone, he has worked with:

- Film crews
- Researchers
- Photographers
- Journalists
- Birdwatching groups
- Conservation organisations

Sharing his passion for wildlife and the African bush remains one of the most rewarding aspects of his work.

Publications

Frank has co-authored more than one hundred publications, including:

- Two books
- An electronic field guide
- Peer-reviewed scientific papers
- Popular articles
- Research reports
- Policy documents

For further information, visit:

- www.frankwillems.org
- https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Frank_Willems2