



Birding Zambia

Your guide: Frank Willems

Frank (1975) is Zambia's leading ornithologist and ecologist. Being from Dutch origin, he worked with the Dutch ornithology trust SOVON after obtaining his MSc in Ecology from Nijmegen University. Most of his professional work focused on the breeding ecology and population dynamics of birds in the Netherlands. His involvement in Foundation WIWO focused on bird research and training projects mainly in Russia and Iran.



He came to Zambia with his wife Inge in early 2008 to work with Kasanka Trust on the management of Kasanka and Lavushi Manda National Parks, as well as Shoebill Island Camp in Bangweulu Wetlands. Tasks varied from mammal and bird monitoring, supervising PhD studies on for instance Shoebill, Kinda Baboon and Straw-coloured Fruit Bat, facilitating film crews and writing management plans, to anti-poaching activities, building scout camps and bridges, creating firebreaks, and filling potholes in the dirt roads. Lavushi Manda N.P. was virtually unexplored before the Trust's involvement from 2008 onwards. Frank is proud to have assisted African Parks in Bangweulu to unravel and significantly reduce the illegal trade in Shoebill chicks. The very Bangweulu Shoebills prominently feature in BBC's monumental "Africa" production, alongside Kasanka's mega-colony of Straw-coloured Fruit Bats (the world's largest mammal migration) and the eagles preying on them, both facilitated by Frank.

Frank and Inge and their by then 5-year old daughter Robin, shifted to manage nearby Mutinondo Wilderness in 2015. A real personal highlight has been the discovery and subsequent description of the Mutinondo Grass Frog, which reproduces in the incredibly marginal seepage film habitats on the dramatic granite inselbergs that dominate the reserve.

Since late 2017 Frank and family, now based near Fringilla, Chisamba, run their own company Kigelia Solutions. Major projects since have included the Birds of Zambia app, a biodiversity survey of the Mafinga Mountains with the BirdLife partner BirdWatch Zambia, an NHK film production on African Skimmer, consultations linked to community conservancies in Mpumba, the creation and management of Kalwelwa Bushcamp in Mwinilunga, and the creation of Birding Zambia. Side activities - which indeed tend to take up a core part of one's time - include the function of 'Zambian Bird Recorder' and Technical Advisor of BirdWatch Zambia, and country rep for African Bird Club. Several of his free-time explorations have focused on remote and unexplored parts of the Mwinilunga district. The large evergreen forests he and others identified using Google Earth, prove to hold real surprises like Vermiculated Fishing-owl and Spot-breasted Ibis. Frank is determined to ultimately create a large conservancy to protect Mwinilunga's rich biodiversity.

From a young age, Frank has guided and trained people, in the Netherlands, Zambia, and many other countries. He loves sharing his passion for and knowledge of the bush. During his twelve years in Zambia, he guided numerous groups in numerous places, including tens of film crews and research groups, photographers and journalists.

Do whatever it takes to get Frank Willems, a Dutch-born ornithologist, as your guide – beg, cheat, bribe – he's worth it. He brings the forest alive and knows every bird and call.

Lucia van der Post, The Financial Times

www.frankwillems.org