

Best of Northern Mwinilunga

September 2022

Dates: Wed 7 September – Sun 18 September (11 nights / 12 days)

Start and end: Lusaka / Solwezi / Mutanda

Guides: Frank Willems & Leslie Reynolds

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: mix of glamping and lodging (3-star)

Participants: minimum 2, maximum 8

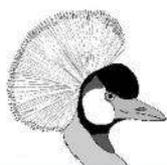
Package price:

International, per person: \$2,574 self-drive & own camping gear; \$2,799 fully inclusive self-drive; \$3,549 fully inclusive including transport*.

Zambian/SADC residents, per person: \$1,674 self-drive & own camping gear; \$1,899 fully inclusive self-drive; \$2,649 fully inclusive including transport*.

** surcharge of \$600 applies if only 1 person books transport*

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 (residents) / \$50 (international) with which comes BWZ membership for 2022 and 2023. For each booking, a donation will be made to BirdWatch Zambia and the Mwinilunga Conservation Project.



BIRDING ZAMBIA

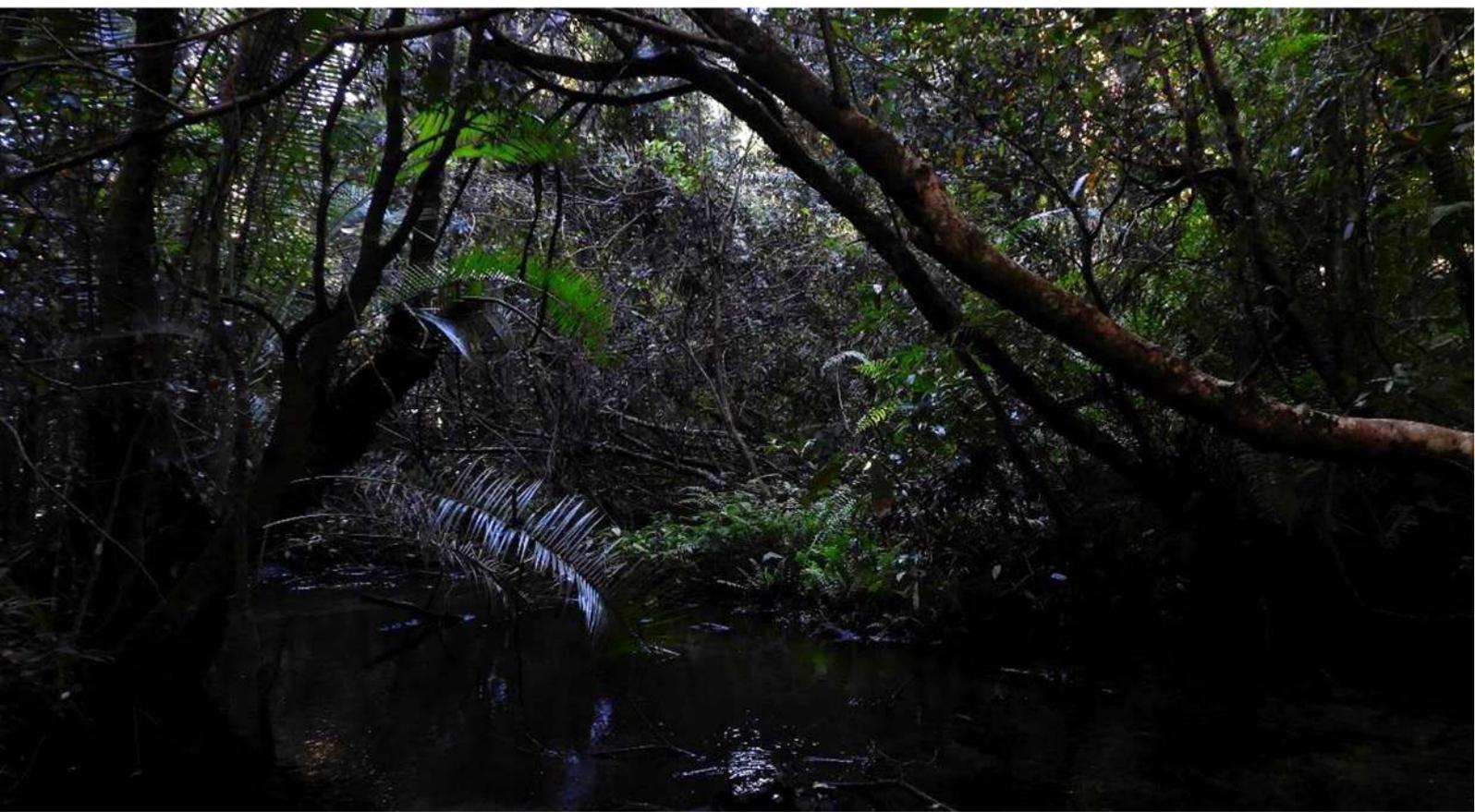
Web www.birdingzambia.com / email: birdingzambia@gmail.com

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 more southern sections are covered with scenic *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 and Bocage's Weaver. Others are typical for the lowland forests and grasslands of Central Africa, such as Spot-breasted Ibis and 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.

Dwarf Galago, White-bellied Tree Pangolin, Giant Otter Shrew and Brush-tailed Porcupine are just a few of the extraordinary tropical mammals hiding in the plains and forests. A good few 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 jewels Nyachisala Forest and Kalwelwa Depression, which form Zambia's largest rainforests, 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 Conservancy which Frank is initiating in partnership with the local community and others.



Detailed program

7 September

Early morning departure from Lusaka with Leslie. 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 and Angolan Swallow.

Alternatively, Solwezi is easily reached by the 15:00 flight with ProFlight from Lusaka. The transfer to Mutanda Nature Lodge takes 30 minutes. Accommodation will be in spacious chalets.

8 September

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 and Spotted Creeper.

After breakfast, you will drive to the Kakoma area, a journey of approximately 7 hours depending on road conditions. The tarmac road crosses Kabompo River, a well-known site for Red-throated Cliff Swallow and Mountain Wagtail. After leaving the tarmac, the route goes through stunning grassland plains and woodlands where you may encounter Mwinilunga's specials such as Black-and-rufous Swallow and Grimwood's Longclaw.

Frank and team will await you with our very comfortable mobile camp at Nyachisala Forest, Zambia's largest rainforest, on the banks of the West-Lunga River.

9 and 10 September

Full days of explorations in the Nyachisala area. The direct surroundings of the camp are the prime area for sought-after birds such as Shining-blue Kingfisher and Bamboo Warbler. Surrounding grasslands and forest hold most of the Mwinilunga specials. Ross's Turaco and Splendid Starling are particularly common. The recently discovered Spot-breasted Ibis and Vermiculated Fishing Owl are likely to be heard, and possibly seen, from camp. We may try to visit also the Tubama section of the forest, where both river and forest are at their broadest and offer very productive birding.

11 September

We will further enjoy the Nyachisala area early morning. After breakfast, we work our way to Kalwelwa, which typically requires 4 hours including packed lunch.

The afternoon will be enjoyed in the bird-rich vicinity of Kalwelwa Bushcamp, Birding Zambia's permanent tented camp.



12 and 13 September

Two full days in the Kalwelwa Depression, a highly diverse and scenic area only known to the ornithological world since 2015. It can be argued to be among Zambia's most 'complete' systems with habitats ranging from desert-like white sands, grasslands, sedge marsh and open water, to deciduous woodlands and both dry and wet evergreen forest. It is now known to hold almost all of the "Mwinilunga specials", most of which in great densities.

Kalwelwa Bushcamp is operated by Frank & Inge. We will spend some time around camp, looking for the likes of Bannerman's Sunbird, Honeyguide Greenbul, Black-collared Bulbul, Stout and Whistling Cisticola, Sharp-tailed Starling and Black-bellied Seedcracker in the forest, grassland and fishponds complex. We might hear the calls of a yet to be identified Dwarf Galago at night, as well as various amphibians of interest.



We will try the extensive rainforests - Zambia's 2nd largest such forest - for Spotted Thrush Babbler, Least Honeyguide, White-spotted Flufftail, Blue Malkoha, Afep, Olive and Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, Shining-blue, Blue-breasted and the elusive White-bellied Kingfisher, while the forest edges may produce Compact Weaver, Black-faced canary and White-chinned Prinia. As recent as May 2021, the presence of Vermiculated Fishing Owl and Spot-breasted Ibis was confirmed here. Vermiculated Fishing Owl forms a prime target for our visit, though sightings are not guaranteed.

We will work the plains in search of Grimwood's, Fülleborn's and Rosy-throated Longclaw, Blue Quail, Locust Finch, Black-chinned Quail Finch, Short-tailed Pipit, a wealth of cisticolas (notably Dambo, Wing-snapping, Pale-crowned, Levillant's, Stout and Tinkling), Angolan Lark, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Black-and-rufous Swallow, Red-throated Wryneck, Wattled Crane, Denham's and Black-bellied Bustard, and much more. The wealth of wetland birds is now known to include breeding African Great Bittern, one of Africa's rarest birds, while displaying African Snipes make for spectacular sunsets.



14 September

Early start from Kalwelwa. We will first dedicate a few hours to Chitunta Plain, where Zambia’s only breeding colony of Bocage’s Weaver is present. Our lunch will be at the Source of the Zambezi, the well-known National Monument which also is of great interest for forest birds. From here, it is another 4 hours to reach our mobile bushcamp in the very remote Jimbe Drainage.

15 and 16 September

Full days in the Jimbe Drainage. The tall evergreen forests here have a stronger ‘Guineo-Congolian affinity’ than any other site in Zambia. Our camp is at “Mad Man’s Crossing”, a site famous as Zambia’s only known locality for the elusive African Shrike-Flycatcher. It is at this very site that Frank together with 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! Other mouth-watering key species here include Green-throated Sunbird, Sooty Flycatcher, Red-tailed Bristlebill, Chestnut Wattle-eye and Orange-cheeked Waxbill. In relative terms, Black-bellied Seedcracker is remarkably common in the small subsistence gardens. 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!



17 September

Early morning start from Jimbe Drainage. We will spend some time in the fascinating mavunda-like Marquesia forest along the road, site of an old unconfirmed sighting of Western Nicator, and continue to the Zambezi Rapids, where we hope to find Forbes’s Plover and Cassin’s Flycatcher.

From here, it is some 7 hours to reach Mutanda Nature Lodge. Time depending, we will still bird the premises.

18 September

Early morning birding within the premises, followed by breakfast and the return drive (9 hours to Lusaka). Optional, there is a flight from Solwezi to Lusaka at 16:50.



Map of the route

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

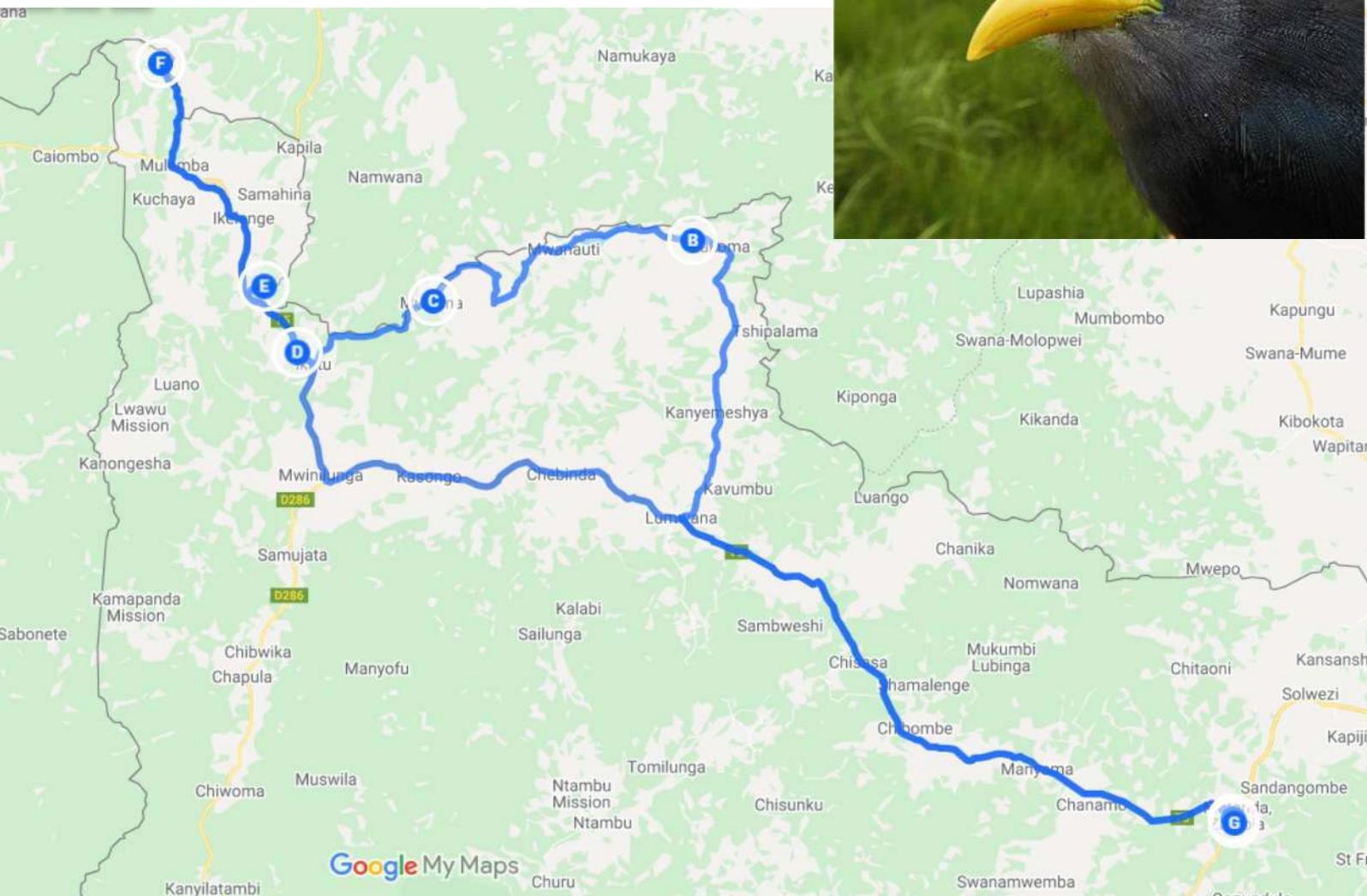


Photo credits: Ross Gallardy (Vermiculated Fishing Owl - Kalwelwa), Wouter van Spijker (Blue-throated and Grey-chinned Sunbird - Jimbe), Frank Willems (all other images - Kalwelwa/Kakoma/Jimbe)

