

Mafinga Mountains

2-11 October 2021



Dates: Sat 2 October – Mon 11 October (9 nights / 10 days)

Guide: Frank Willems

Package type: “Birds & Bush” guided hiking safari. Reasonable fitness required.

We’re spending as much time as feasible in wild places, where the focus is on birding while exploring, with ample attention for the landscape and other wildlife such as reptiles and amphibians.

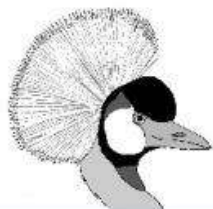
Accommodation type: bush camping in Mafinga, lodging to/from Mafinga (2/3-star)

Package price: \$1,420 self-drive, own camping gear / \$1,720 self-drive, camping gear provided / \$2,320 transport and camping gear provided pp.

Participants: minimum 2, maximum 8

The rate is a 2021 residents special. Included are all guiding services, catering, tea & coffee, accommodation (to/from Mafinga) and porters (Mafinga). Excluded are drinks 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 2021 and 2022. For each booking, a donation will be made to BirdWatch Zambia and the Mwinilunga Conservation Project.



BIRDING ZAMBIA

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Introduction: Mafinga Mountains: Zambia's highest peak and Luangwa Source

The term 'best-kept secret' certainly is used too lightly in advertisement, but Mafinga does make an excellent candidate to deserve it. This magnificent plateau, on the border with Malawi, and accessible on foot only, towers out some 1.5 km above the adjacent Luangwa Valley, with the source of the Luangwa river hidden in one of its many steep forested valleys. The plateau is largely above 2,000 m asl, with the peak – Zambia's highest point – at some 2,330 m asl. Grasslands dominate the flat areas on top of the breathtakingly beautiful plateau, while the flanks are mainly covered with miombo. Among the many afro-montane forest patches – a habitat limited in Zambia to the Mafinga-Nyika area, among Zambia's biodiversity hotspots – is the 40 hectares Mulangale Forest.

A 2018 BirdWatch Zambia survey led by Frank and Leslie Reynolds yielded lots of firsts for the Mafingas, including Blue Swallow (only known to breed on Nyika), Brown-throated Martin of race *ducis* (new to Zambia), and range-restricted Churring Cisticola. The avifauna is dominated by afro-montane species. Forests hold jewels like Bar-tailed Trogon, White-chested Alethe, Moustached Tinkerbird, Starred Robin and Chapin's Apalis, with White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Malawi Batis, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and Red-faced Crimsonwing among specials in the edges. Rock Kestrel and Common Quail inhabit the open areas. Sunbirds include the spectacular Malachite and Bronzy Sunbird. Black-lored, Wailing, Churring, Lazy and Wing-snapping Cisticolas all occupy their own niches. We will form our own opinion of 'Winterbottom's Pipit' which is yet to be properly classified.

The avifauna admittedly is not as rich in specials as on the larger Nyika Plateau, but holds several species absent from Nyika, reflecting an association with the Tanzanian Eastern Arc mountains. Our timing should be good for Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, mainly known as scarce seasonal visitor to Mulangale Forest. Placid Greenbul and Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler are restricted to Mafinga in Zambia, while the only record of Sharpe's Starling comes from the Luangwa Source area.

The fascinating herpetofauna includes the tiny and rare Nchisi Pygmy Chameleon, confirmed during the 2018 survey. This survey also discovered Spotted Reed Frog and the bat Long-haired Rousette new to Zambia. Although large mammals have been decimated by hunting, Chequered Giant Sengi and Blue Monkey are likely to be seen.

The timing of the trip is partly chosen to include 'Global Big Day' on October 9th, during which we expect to contribute significantly to Zambia's species total.

The Mafinga area is the scope of a new conservation project run by WeForest and WECSZ together with the community. Our visit fits the aim of developing ecotourism. We will learn more about the conservation project during our visit.



Detailed program

2 October

Day of driving. We aim to meet up in Isoka (12-hour drive from Lusaka) where we will stay in a basic guesthouse. Exact arrangements TBC.

If self-driving: an attractive alternative is to start off on Friday and stay overnight along the way, for instance at Forest Inn (4 hours) or Mutinondo Wilderness (8 hours).

*3 October*

Early morning drive to Mafinga (4 hours). We will drive up to the Zinsa Valley, crossing the Luangwa River and birding along the way. We will park the vehicle and meet our porters at Maliko village around lunchtime. From here, it is a 2-hour hike (4 km / 160 m rise) to the Zinsa/Nalupiga confluence (1696 m asl) where we set up camp for 2 nights.

*4 October*

An easy day, acclimatising and exploring the mid-elevation wet forests and bracken-briar of the Zinsa and Nalupiga Valleys. Albeit seriously impacted by human activities, these areas remain very productive. We expect to get acquainted with the likes of Olive Pigeon, Red-winged Warbler, Singing Cisticola, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Sharpe's Greenbul, Chapin's Apalis and so on. Slender-billed Starling was present here in 2018, of which we

would love better confirmation. An old record of Sharpe's Akalat comes from this area. Nocturnal searching may reveal Nchisi Pygmy Chameleon and Spotted Reed Frog.

5 October

Early morning birding in the Zinsa-Nalupiga area. After early brunch, we pack camp and start off to ascend onto the plateau. The first kilometer in horizontal straight-line distance will see us rise some 400 meters, after which it is a more gentle walk to the grassy Masuwa area (2210 m asl). From here, the track leads through stunning grasslands with rocks and strips of afro-montane forest, up to the Musipizi Source area, near the Luangwa Source, where we set up camp for 2 nights (approx. 2018 m asl).

6 October

Full day to explore the area around the Luangwa Source. It is here that Sharpe's Starling was seen in 2002. Interesting finds in 2018 included Blue Swallow, Cinnamon-bracken Warbler, Churring Cisticola and Black-lored Cisticola.



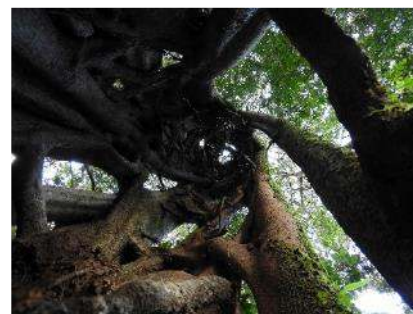


7 October

Early morning birding in the Musipizi Source area, in search of the likes of Red-faced Crimsonwing. After early brunch, we will hike to Mulangale Forest, a 4 km hike through scenically spectacular, undulating terrain. Camp will be set up at the edge of Mulangale Forest (1900 m asl). Afternoon birding around camp.

8 October

Full day in the 40-hectares Mulangale Forest, one of Zambia's largest afro-montane forest patches. We have our hopes up high for Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, with other forest specials including White-chested Alethe, Bar-tailed Trogon, Forest Double-collared Sunbird, Placid and Sharpe's Greenbul and Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler. A nocturnal search may yield Nchisi Pygmy Chameleon.



9 October

Global Big Day. Today we will keep separate track of our species list, which likely will include numerous species not recorded elsewhere in Zambia on this day. Early morning birding in Mulangale Forest. After an early brunch, we pack up and hike towards the Masuwa area, a 2-hour (3-km) walk involving some steep descending and ascending. In the afternoon, we will bird the Masuwa area, a mosaic of grasslands, rocks and wet forest strips. It is here that we had a putative record of Orange Ground Thrush in 2018, while White-chested Alethe and Bar-tailed Trogon were recorded in a nearby forest patch.

10 October

A long travel day. We will pack camp at first light and descend down from the plateau, with birding along the way. Arrival at Maliko is anticipated to be around 11:00, from where it is a 6-hour drive to Kapishya Hot Springs. Time depending, we may do some birding along Lake Shiwa Ngandu on the way in, or around the hot springs itself. Overnight in comfortable chalets.



11 October

Departure day. It is a 10-hour (650 km) drive back to Lusaka, which you may decide to break up. Details TBC, open to preferences.

Hiking arrangements and what to bring

Mafinga Mountains can only be accessed on foot. Hiking requires reasonable fitness. We will ascend and descend the mountains using the route from Maliko Village (1530 m asl) to Masuwa Campsite (2210 m asl) – some 700 meter difference in elevation, of which approximately half a steep climb. We will have a porter per participant. Please ensure you are packed lightly to minimize the weight the porters need to carry. Anticipate carrying a small, 5 kg day pack yourself, with water, snacks, rain-/wind-stopper, camera etcetera. Goods (an additional set of clean cloths!) can be left safely in the vehicles in Maliko.

Weather conditions are unpredictable in October. We expect hot sunny weather, though it may also be overcast with an occasional shower, and/or chilly windy mornings. Ensure to be prepared for hot and cold, dry and wet.

Essential to bring: sturdy hiking boots / hiking sandals (no thorns but sharp rocks), a (thin) raincoat / wind stopper, fleece jacket, hat or cap, sunblock, insect repellent, water bottle, small daypack, large backpack (to be carried by porter). Camping gear needs to be lightweight and include tent, sleeping mat, beddings, chair.

Birding Zambia will provide all catering. Due to weight restrictions, our general setup will be basic compared to other Birding Zambia tours. Note that only drinking water, tea and coffee will be provided. Any other drinks should be brought by the participants.

Disclaimer

Although Birding Zambia does its utmost best to ensure your safety during this trip, participation is completely at your own risk. Please ensure you have adequate medical insurance.

