

# West-Lunga National Park & Mwinilunga August 2020

**Dates:** 19-30 August (11 nights / 12 days)

**Guide:** 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.*

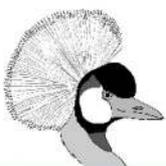
**Accommodation type:** comfortable camping, lodging (2/3-star)

**Package price:** \$1,750 self-drive / \$2,473 including transport pp

*The rate is a 2020 Special. 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 2020 and 2021.*

*For each booking, a donation will be made to BirdWatch Zambia.*



## **BIRDING ZAMBIA**

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## Introduction: West-Lunga

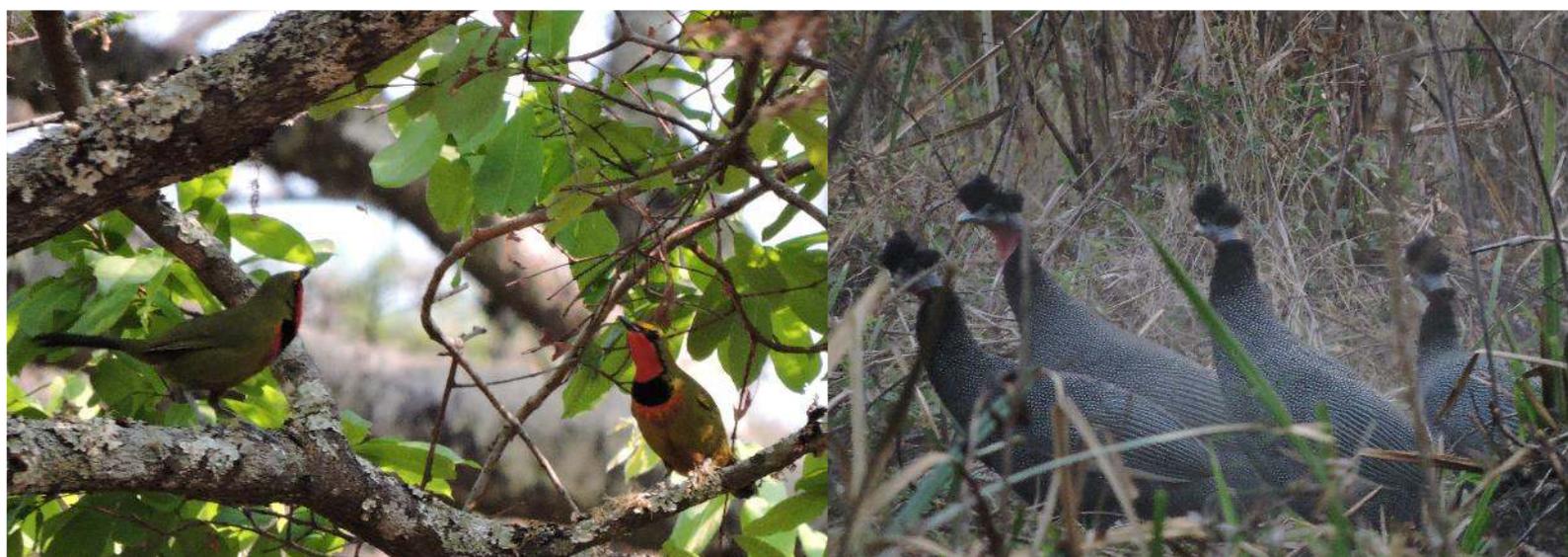
With a surface of 168,400 hectares, West-Lunga N.P. is among Zambia's larger parks. It protects a significant stretch of the West-Lunga and Kabompo Rivers and the mosaic of forest, woodlands and grasslands in between these.

Much of the park is dominated by *Cryptosepalum* or "mavunda" forests. This dry evergreen forest type is Africa's largest forest block after the Guineo-Congolian forests. It is characterised by *Cryptosepalum pseudotaxus* as a common species among emergent trees, from which the name derives. The understorey consists of an impenetrable layer of evergreen thicket. The single known specimen of the enigmatic White-chested Tinkerbird comes from this habitat just west of West-Lunga National Park, while Margaret's Batis is near-endemic to this habitat. Other specials include the indeed highly attractive Gorgeous Bushshrike and Crested Guinea fowl of the attractive race *kathleenae* (Western Crested Guinea fowl). In addition, many miombo birds occupy the canopy while species of both dry and wet evergreen forest are present in the understorey. The diminutive Blue Duiker is among the more common mammals.

Tall riverine evergreen forests, grassy floodplains and papyrus swamps flank the West-Lunga and Kabompo Rivers. The southern sections include extensive *Chipya* ("burnt") forests with majestic Rosewood trees among others. In addition, several very large scenic grassland plains are present, boasting a whole different set of birds and mammals.

WLNP is among Zambia's least visited parks with less than 10 tourists per year. Until recently, access to the park was problematic. Recent efforts by the Trident Foundation in collaboration with WWF and DNPW have made access straight-forward. The well-maintained spinal road allows for easy access into the main grassland plain and some intact areas of mavunda, an otherwise impenetrable habitat.

Mammal populations are clearly on the rebound. An exploratory 4-night visit in June-July 2020 yielded sightings of Sitatunga, Blue Monkey, Blue Duiker, Oribi, Puku, Bushbuck, Hippo and Sun Squirrel, plus evidence of Elephant, Buffalo and Bushpig among others.



## Introduction: Mwinilunga, where Congo meets Kalahari

Among birders and ecologists, Mwinilunga needs little introduction. The district in the extreme northwest of Zambia, 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. 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, Bocage's Weaver and Dambo Cisticola. Others are typical for the lowland forests or the grasslands of Central Africa (e.g. Spot-breasted Ibis and Black-collared Bulbul, respectively), while yet other species are more typical of Africa's montane areas (e.g. Olive Pigeon and Red-throated wryneck).

A good few other endemic organisms occur, such as the Sakeji Horseshoe Bat and Katanga Bush Viper. Giant Otter Shrew and Brush-tailed Porcupine are just two of many extraordinary tropical mammals.

This far-flung corner remains very remote. Birding Zambia offers a unique package, hoping to stimulate birders and nature enthusiast to explore the area. Your guides, Frank Willems and Leslie Reynolds, have extensively explored this area. The focus will be on sharing the magic of recently discovered jewels Nyachisala Forest and Kalwelwa Plains & Forest Complex while tying in some of the well-known sites, Chitunta Plain and the Source of the Zambezi.

We stay overnight in truly remote wilderness areas. Although the focus is on birds, one doesn't need to be a "twitcher" to join; there will be ample opportunity to look at other wildlife or just enjoy the bush.

Your visit will not only support BirdWatch Zambia, but also the Mwinilunga Conservancy which Frank is initiating in partnership with the local community and other partners.



## Detailed program

### 19 August

Early morning departure from Lusaka with Leslie Reynolds. Overnight at Kafue River Lodge, approx. 5 hours drive. The afternoon can be dedicated to exploring this game- and bird-rich and beautiful part of the Kafue ecosystem directly upstream of the National Park.

### 20 August

Considering the drive from KRL (approx. 6 hours), we will place camp close to the Jivundu Pontoon in the southern section of the West-Lunga NP. This area holds extensive floodplains with papyrus. We are likely to find Sitatunga here and a range of wetland birds. On arrival, you will meet Frank and team here.

### 21 August

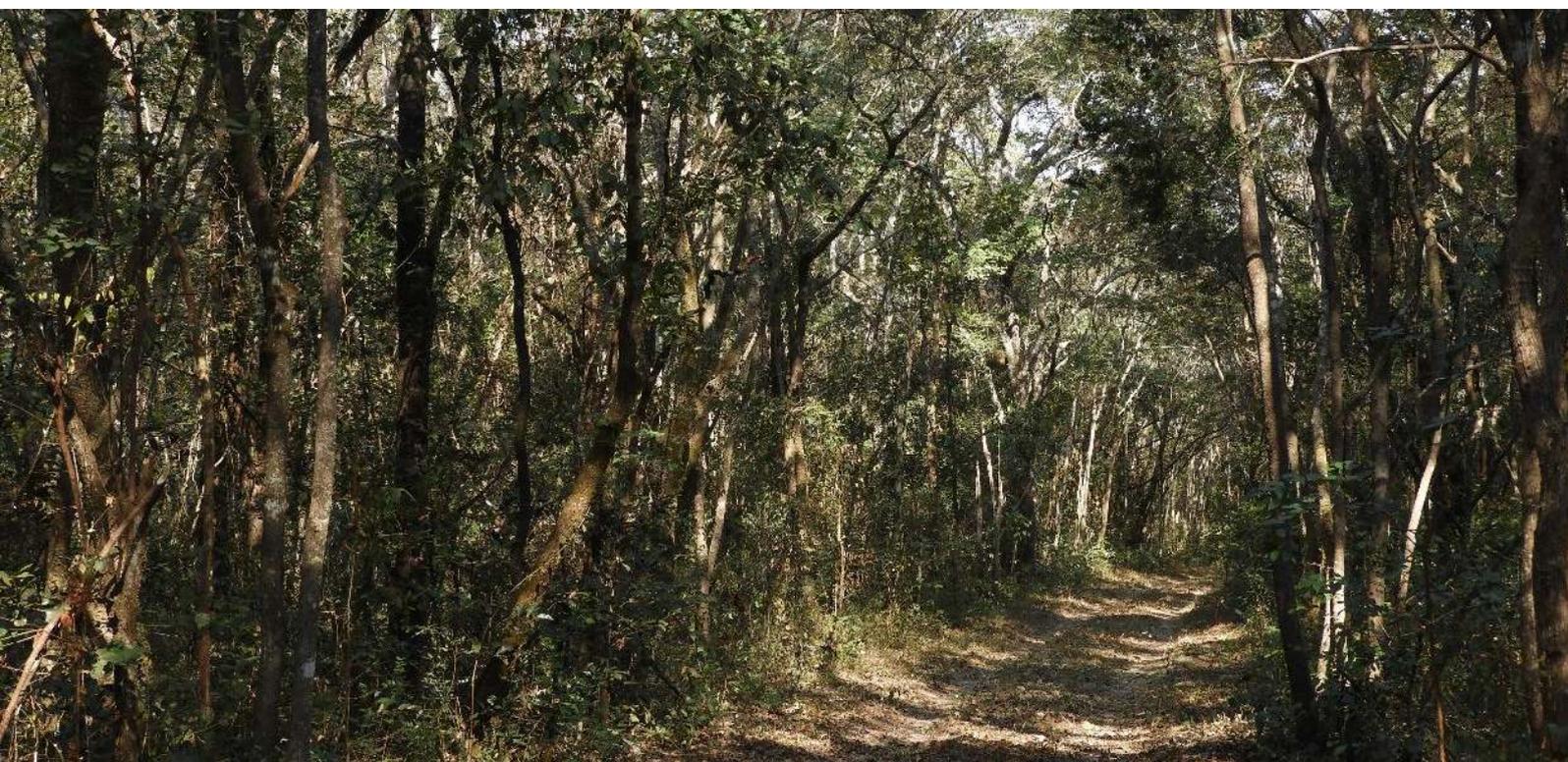
Full day of explorations in the park. We will make an early start so that we reach the central grasslands in good time. Oribi is commonly seen here, as are several other plains animals. The rich avifauna includes Fülleborn's and Rosy-throated Longclaw, Black-rumped Buttonquail and Locustfinch among others. We will have lunch in the bush, after which we proceed to a prime patch of *mavunda* where we shall spend the night. The afternoon will be used to enjoy this habitat, with optional further exploration by vehicle.

### 22 August

We will dedicate the morning to exploring the *mavunda* forests. After breakfast, we will continue into the northeastern section of the park, dominated by a mixture of *mavunda*, grassy dambos and streams. We will reach the Ntambu Community Campsite mid afternoon. After setting up camp, we will have the rest of the afternoon to explore the adjacent part of the scenic Kabompo River.

### 23 August

Details tbc. We will probably dedicate the morning to visiting some of the falls between here and Mwinilunga town. We will stay overnight at the scenic Rea's property just north of town. The rich miombo birding includes Bar-winged Weaver.



24 August

Early morning birding at the Rea's property. We will continue mid-morning to Chitunta Plain which is best known for Grimwood's Longclaw, and on to the Source of the Zambezi. This National Monument does not only hold the source of the mighty Zambezi, but also great birding including Red-tailed Bristlebill, Buff-throated Apalis and Blue Malkoha.

We will reach Kalwelwa Bushcamp late afternoon.

25 & 26 August

Two full days in the Kalwelwa depression, a highly diverse and scenic area only known to the ornithological world since 2015.

Kalwelwa Bushcamp is operated by Frank. We will spend the afternoon 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 such as Cinnamon Tree Frog.

We will try the extensive evergreen forests for Least Honeyguide, White-spotted Flufftail, Blue Malkoha, Afep 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. We will work the plains in search of all 3 species of longclaws, Damboo, Wing-snapping, Pale-crowned, Stout, Croaking and Tinkling Cisticola, Angolan Lark, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Black-and-rufous Swallow, Red-throated Wryneck, Wattled Crane, Denham's and Black-bellied Bustard, and much more.

27 August

After a couple of hours early morning birding and breakfast at Kalwelwa, we will drive to Nyachisala Forest, a drive of some 5 hours including few short stops along the way. We will pass a stunning landscape dominated by woodlands, vast swamps and exciting evergreen forests. Arrival in late afternoon at Nyachisala Mobile Bushcamp operated by Frank.

28 August

Full day at Nyachisala Forest, Zambia's largest wet evergreen forest along the West-Lunga river. This is the site of the surprising discovery of Spot-breasted Ibis in late 2017. This also proves Zambia's best site for Vermiculated Fishing Owl (an even bigger recent surprise, discovered only in 2015), Spotted Thrush-babbler, Bamboo Warbler and Shining-blue Kingfisher. We also expect to find Grey-winged Robin-chat, Fraser's Rufous Thrush, Brown-eared Woodpecker, Bates's Sunbird and Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher among others. The plains are likely to produce a wealth of cisticola's, Compact Weaver, Black-collared Bulbul and much more. We hope to catch a glimpse of some of the exciting reptiles that have been found here, such as Katanga Bush Viper, Dewitte's Five-toed Skink, Heenen's Dwarf Gecko and possibly an undescribed species of green snake.



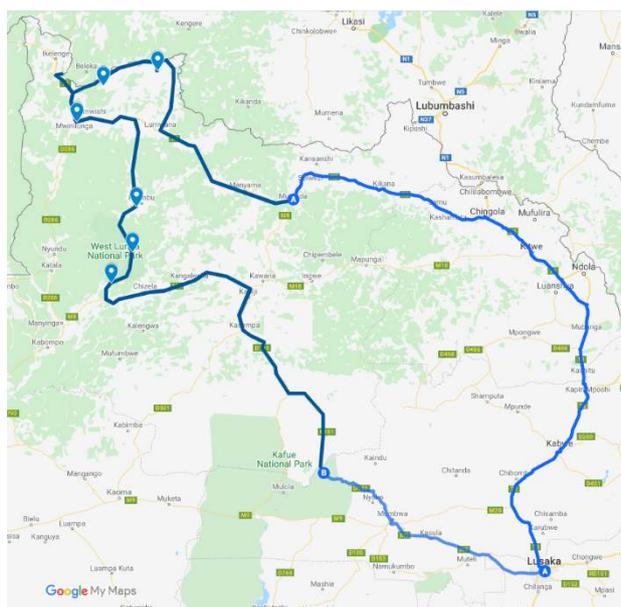
### 29 August

We will make the best of the dawn birding at Nyachisala. After breakfast, we will drive towards the tarmac road, a drive of some 70 km (4 hours) through stunning landscapes dominated by tall woodlands and vast grassland plains, which hold Red-throated Wryneck, Grimwood’s Longclaw, Locustfinch and Black-and-rufous Swallow. Frank will join up till our lunch spot in the largest and wettest plain along this route. Once on the tarmac, we might want to stop at one or two of the bridges on the tarmac road to check for the likes of Red-throated Cliff Swallow. After 160 km (partly potholed; 2 hours) we will reach Mutanda Nature Lodge.

Time depending, we will bird the premises of Mutanda Nature Lodge. This may well produce specials not yet seen during the trip, such as Bocage’s Akalat, Grey-olive Greenbul and Cassin’s Flycatcher, as well as Bamboo Warbler, Red-throated Cliff Swallow, White-chinned Prinia, Olive Woodpecker, Half-collared Kingfisher and Square-tailed Drongo.

### 30 August

Early morning birding within the premises, followed by breakfast and the 9-hour return drive to Lusaka.



Map of the route

Markers indicate overnight stays, in clockwise order.

