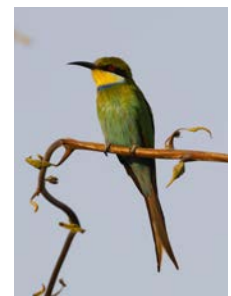


# Crossing the Zambezi: A Zambia and Zimbabwe Safari | July 27 – August 18, 2024

## Trip Report | by Peg Abbott



**Guide Peg Abbott with local guide Frank Willems. Our participants were Marjorie, Gerard, Ann, Nancy, and Carol.**



This was a NEW journey for Naturalist Journeys, after several years in the works and much planning to select top experiences among a mosaic of habitats and experiences available. We had reached into both countries from our many trips to Botswana and South Africa, but finally we were here to dive in with more detail. We could have stayed a month in each country – here are a few of the details.

### **Fri., July 26 Early Arrivals to Lusaka | Rest Up and Enjoy the Gardens**

Peg, Nancy and Ann arrived early in Zambia to have time to rest up from travel. Our gracious small hotel outside of the city and not far from the airport was just the right place to do so. It was a green oasis with huge arching trees that shaded a well-watered lawn and garden area. We were able to check into our little thatched-roof cottages before lunch, charmed immediately by the decorating touches of African fabrics, art, and metal sculptures. We got a bit organized, slept, and walked around the gardens at leisure. Around 4 PM we met for birding and had fun sorting out Red-eyed Doves, Kurrichane Thrush, Variable, Collared and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, Pied Crow, and at sunset, a quick glimpse at our first regional specialty, the Lillian's Lovebird.



The hotel had a pool, bar and outdoor tables for dining. We had a delightful dinner while enjoying the evening air and the sounds of Peter's Epauletted Fruit Bats chirping in the canopy, and then we crawled inside our mosquito netting on very comfortable beds for a good night's rest.

### **Sat., July 27            The Zim-Zam Adventure Begins!**

Carol arrived this morning and after a long wait and anticipation of a new adventure we were thrilled to be in Zambia. We met Frank Willems, our guide for the trip, and his delightful partner Inge who had accompanied him down from their home about an hour north of the city. Over a leisurely patio lunch we got to know each other and learn more about our upcoming trip. Mid-afternoon, Marjorie and Gerry arrived and our group was complete.

There was plenty to see right on the property. A white-flowering tree drew our attention and must have had rich nectar, evidenced by several species of sunbirds actively feeding; Variable, Collared and Scarlet-chested put on a good show. A Brown-hooded Kingfisher called loudly and kept dropping down to the lawn to feed on insects. As daylight faded, we ambled to the back part of the property and found all kinds of species, sorting out weavers (Village, Lesser Masked, Southern Masked) and admiring the colors of Red-billed Firefinch and Southern Cordonbleus.

One by one we dropped off, still feeling jet-lagged, but the more tenacious ones had the thrill of finding African Hoopoe and Olive Woodpecker before heading over to dinner. The staff at Wild Dogs lodge was so welcoming and gracious; we really enjoyed our meals and sitting outside for dinner.

### **Sun., July 28            Lusaka to Kafue National Park | Mukambi Lodge**

We had an excellent start that first morning, making the rounds of the property, and now with Frank's keen ear, we found 42 species before breakfast! Black-collared Barbets put on a good show, as did two calling Tropical Boubou and a couple of Black-backed Puffbirds. Dapper White-browed Robin Chats serenaded us as we sorted out Tawny-flanked Prinia and Red-faced Cisticola and two species of Mannikin -- Bronze and Black-and-white. Frank talked about mimicry as we watched Southern Black Flycatcher associating with the more aggressive Fork-tailed Drongos. Pin-tailed Whydah and two species of Indigobird (Purple and Village) came in to drink in small water pools alongside brighter Brimstone Canaries. Throughout the trip we would enjoy Frank's encyclopedic knowledge gained over the last 25 years working in research and park management as well as tourism.



After a filling full English breakfast, we were bound for Kafue National Park, Zambia’s first-established and largest protected area, but we got a lesson in patience waiting for our drivers, who were delayed by a flat tire that needed repair. Our 9 AM pick up turned into 11:30 AM. Thankfully once underway the road was good (paved) and we made good time, watching the hum of agricultural life and passing vendors selling tomatoes and other vegetables. We arrived in time for a late lunch at Mukambi Safari Lodge with the chance to still hop on to the afternoon sunset cruise boat trip.

The lodge has a wonderful high ceiling over a maze of decks, all with a view of the river. Large trees provide shade and lovely African fabrics in various sitting nooks invite relaxation. We took a short break and ventured forth, excited to begin the adventure.

Being on the water after our long time of travel felt so good. There was a lovely cool breeze on the small boat reserved for just our group and right away, casting off the dock, Peg spotted a prize – our first African Finfoot! It was swimming out in the open, looking a lot like a North American loon in profile. Zambia is one of the easiest places to find this unique species. Not long after this sighting we had a Giant Kingfisher and then a brilliantly colored Half-collared Kingfisher in our view – off to a cracking start.

We watched Hippos cavorting, sized up several Nile Crocodile from small to huge, and made our way over to an area of aquatic vegetation. Here was the mother lode with African Openbill, Sacred Ibis, Squacco Heron, both Egyptian and Spur-winged Geese, and Great Egrets feeding. In between them, numerous African Jacanas fed and flew and on the outer margins Frank spotted the first of three Lesser Jacanas – always a good find across their range as their shallow-water with emergent vegetation habitat choice is narrow. A lone Gray-hooded Gull was down resting on the vegetation, the only one we would see for the trip. Both Long-tailed and Great Cormorants flew up and down the river. Our captain dropped an anchor in the shallows with all this in view to pour us some sundowners; all this and gin and tonics too! The sun went down bright red, the first of many African sunsets we would savor.



## Mon., July 29 Kafue National Park

What a lovely place to wake up, with the tea and coffee station open early and a wide patio view of the river. Long-tailed Cormorants flew up and down and a swimming African Finfoot left a wake that cut the quiet water. Our local guide Aaron briefed us on our plans and off we went, out for a full morning safari. The first step each trip was to boat across the river to where our safari vehicles were parked, and at dawn it was surprisingly chilly. Thankfully they had nice warm ponchos for us to wear as we set out.

Kafue National Park is vast (the size of two Yellowstone National Parks) and diverse, with over 500 species of birds and 21 different antelopes in a mosaic habitat of savanna, with riverine, Miombo and Mopane woodlands. We found a nice group of Defassa Waterbuck with a posing male soon after sunrise, interspersed with the more numerous Puku and Impala. We learned about breeding herds, bachelor herds, and lone males. Candelabra “trees” (giant columnar euphorbias, *Euphorbia ingens*) stuck out of huge termite mounds and fruiting Jackalberry Trees (*Diospyros mespiliformis*) were magnets for colorful fruit-eating birds – including Schalow’s Turacos and Meyer’s Parrots.

We were excited to find and watch a breeding group of African Elephants, with several big females and their various-aged young, which included several small yearlings. The first herds were at a distance and tolerated us well, but coming down a curve in thicker woodland we had to pause when a herd was on either side of the road. Kafue’s Elephants are not acclimated and deserve more caution than many of the more-visited parks. We waited for the herd to cross the road, rewarded for our patience by spotting an African Barred Owl in the process which sat a long time for our photographs and views. Another half hour or so down the road, a small group of Elephant with young crossed going to the river, and once there shook their ears and seemed wary. One trumpeted loudly when some Puku got too close, and as Frank pointed out, it was probably easier to take out their nervous energy on the Puku than on us, but we were impressed!

It was wonderful not to feel rushed; we had several days ahead of us in the park, so there was time to stop for birds and mammals and to video interesting behaviors. We asked frequent questions as we tried to piece together the patterns of habitat on the landscape, closely tied to changing soils as we drove. We had good views of Lizard Buzzard and Gray Go-Away Birds, and spotted four species of woodpeckers: Cardinal, Green-backed, Bennett’s and Golden-tailed. We had three species of beautifully patterned bee-eaters: Little, White-fronted and Swallow-tailed, and found a terrestrial type of kingfisher (Striped), a bark gleaner (Common Scimitarbill) and one of Peg’s favorites, a group of “giggling ladies” (Green Wood-hoopoes), a reference to their calls.



Mid-morning, we found a clear, safe area for a bush pit stop and tea, with delicious carrot muffins and homemade cookies. The return trip to the lodge was full of barbets, honeyguides, greenbuls and cisticolas, a first-rate introduction to African bird families.

It was very nice to have a good lunch, cold drinks and some down time. Two BIG bull Elephants kept Carol in her cabin but she got some fine views of close-up feeding. Several stayed up in the pool area and shaded lounge with the river view, taking advantage of the WiFi and enjoying some garden birding with views of Holub's Golden Weaver, comical Arrow-marked Bblers, and Gray-Olive Greenbul, a regional specialty Frank was pleased to have a chance to get good photos of. Time passed quickly and we soon gathered for tea and the afternoon drive.

Our plan was to go out and linger into darkness to do a bit of spotlighting. We found and compared two species of snake eagles: Brown with a big rounded head, and Banded; a bit more streamlined. We found a Tawny Eagle on a likely nest, a very impressive raptor. We enjoyed sundowners with a view to cap off a most fulfilling day. Our night drive was not legendary, but we did get to see a Spotted Hyena well, and two Scrub Hare.

## **Tues. July 30 Kafue National Park**

After an early breakfast at the lodge, with yoghurt, fruit, toast and scrambled eggs, we crossed the river by boat to our waiting safari vehicles. A Black Crake walked across the backs of the hippo pod in the cove next to the dock area, much to our delight. It was cold in the early hour and we were grateful for cozy lined ponchos available for us to wrap up in. Right away we started seeing Puku, Impala and numerous birds. By day's end that total was close to a 100 species! A pair of Racket-tailed Rollers was a big hit, especially when they took to the sky, calling loudly. In a huge fruiting Sycamore Fig, Aaron spotted a pair of Zambia's endemic Chaplin's Barbets. It was a family group and they were calling and feeding, and though not close, we got super looks. There were African Green Pigeons in the tree as well and sunlight showed off their beautiful plumage. Arnot's Chat, a regional endemic, was visible in the lovely woodland, along with Crowned Hornbill, Striped Kingfisher, Retz's Helmetshrike, and Cardinal Woodpecker. By a small tree thicket we found Peter's Twinspot, alerted by its high call. Fortunately, it came quite close and we delighted in seeing its spots and colors close-up. We passed through grasslands and studied Croaking Cisticola, Capped Wheatear, and Buffy Pipit, and then stopped by a pond area where we picked out Water Thick-knee and Yellow-billed Stork.



We followed the course of the Shishamba River over to Fig Tree Camp, also owned by Mukambi Lodge, and as a treat they let us have lunch there, making a longer driving foray possible. In a particularly lush section of riverine habitat we stopped to watch Hippos basking out of the water in deep sand, only to find feeding Bohm's Bee-eaters, a regional specialty species, perching all around us. We passed through some Miombo woodland and found Miombo Scrub-Robin, Miombo (Lesser Blue-eared) Starling, Southern Black Tit, and several Brown-crowned Tchagra. We passed a small herd of Lichtenstein's Hartebeest and encountered White-headed Vultures, a notable species as they are in decline.

Just shy of Fig Tree Lodge we were glassing some fields when we heard what sounded like a Kinda Baboon fight, but then realized it was an alarm call when we saw them all looking in the same direction. We went quickly over to the edge of the woodland, and were thrilled to find a Leopard, bedded down but watching intently a flock of Helmeted Guineafowl. The baboons had tipped off the birds and the Leopard seemed resigned to finding no lunch here. We watched as it slipped into a small eroded gully. It followed that narrow winding cleft back towards one of the big ponds and we were able to follow. This astute predator was oblivious to us, pausing to sniff out a grass cluster. We'll never know what was in it but something made the Leopard jump and depart, perhaps a snake? At one point it laid down and licked its paws and started grooming, then got up, looking over to us with only eyes and ears showing above the soil. At the lake edge it turned and walked to a viewpoint of a herd of Puku, too far for a rush, but possible for a slow pursuit. We let it be and were thrilled with our sighting, particularly as we were the only people around. Seeing a large predator without other vehicles around is a rare treat in Africa these days and we felt fortunate.

Ellen, the daughter of Mukambi Lodge's owners, greeted us graciously at Fig Tree Lodge, and they had a table set down by a large pond. A Goliath Heron, Wattle Lapwing, Hadada Ibis and both Black-collared and Black-backed Barbets were our lunch time companions. We enjoyed beef or fish pasta with homemade bread, roasted squash and beets and salad, yum!

We chose a return trip routed along the other side of the river, but as it was narrow had a view of some of the same ponds and open areas. One of the small ponds held a Finfoot, two giant Nile Crocodile and a lone Hippo. Nearby we had good looks in flight of Schalow's Turaco; its red underwings quite striking against the green. Two pair of Trumpeter Hornbill flew over and we were able to see a perched, then a flying Bateleur.



Anna Kusler of the Zambia Carnivore Program joined us to give a presentation on the Zambia Carnivore Program. <https://www.zambiacarnivores.org/> She is part of their Greater Kafue (park and surrounding game reserves) team and has worked on both Wild Dogs and Cheetah. She was well prepared and gave us excellent background information and some insight into the dynamics of large carnivores with each other and the prey base of the park, which is in the process of recovery after many years of serious poaching. They have an energetic team here and we were pleased to support them by bringing optics and gear, and we made a pledge to help support the current group of interns through the end of the year.

### **Wed., July 31 Kafue National Park to Lusaka | Wild Dogs Lodge**

Our group split up today, according to interests, with most selecting a walking safari for a nice change of pace. They found the “small five” including ant lions, and studied scat and tracks on a small loop from the boat ramp area. Highlights included finding a praying mantis with egg cases, African Porcupine quills, a lion casting full of bones and part of a tortoise scute, and a quick glimpse at African Goshawk. Meyer’s Parrots put on a good show, along with Southern Yellow White-eyes. Back at camp they did a little birding with eye-level views of Olive Woodpecker.

Peg and Carol joined a family from the Netherlands and driver guide Boyd to explore an open country woodland mosaic that had a chance for us to view Roan Antelope. We had passed by quite a bit of this yesterday but scanning revealed Puku, Defassa Waterbuck and Impala but no larger antelopes. We did find Sharpe’s Grysbok and enjoyed a chance to photograph it staring at us, with its intricately-patterned ears in view. Highlights of the drive included another close Leopard sighting, this one of a female on a termite mound, hidden partially by branches but not so much our eyes could not lock on to hers. At one point she bared her teeth and we decided not to pressure her and to move away, let her relax in that shaded spot. At the “Hamerkop” pool of yesterday, we saw a number of White-backed Vultures in trees, enough we suspected a kill. We found instead three fat-bellied female lions enjoying cool sand and a chance to drink at the water’s edge. There was a juvenile African Fish Eagle present, more Hamerkops and at least thirty Marabou Stork, flying the water for catfish.

Back at camp we packed up our gear and enjoyed a last lunch, a beef or veggie quesadilla and fresh salad with olives and feta. A Collared Sunbird joined a group of Arrow-marked Babbler just off the patio and we snapped photos against the background of the Kafue River. We would miss this peaceful view and place!



Our two drivers patiently allowed us to check one last time an area known for Roan Antelope, and while we did not find them, at a small pond we saw Spur-winged Goose, African Jacana and a just-hatched chick at the nest of Wattled Cranes there.

The rest of our day was spent in travel, heading back to Lusaka to regroup at Wild Dogs Lodge before heading to our next national park the next day.

## **Thurs., Aug. 1 Flight to Mfuwe & South Luangwa National Park**

We said good-bye to our gracious hosts, as today we would change course and head east of Lusaka by air. The flight was about an hour, and we landed in Mfuwe in the late morning, heading right up to our lodge for lunch and time to settle in. Leaving the airport, we had a quick view of Carmine Bee-eater and Lizard Buzzard on utility wires between open land and a series of local businesses for tourists, including Mulberry Mongoose, a store that sells jewelry recrafted from wildlife snares, and Tribal Textiles, a business of 30 years plus that creates hand-painted fabrics.

Flat Dogs Camp was to be our home for the next few days, named for Crocodiles quite abundant on the Luangwa River it is located beside. We did the paperwork of check in and enjoyed lunch, with a lovely choice of menu options carefully written out on a chalkboard, with too many dishes to choose from. Fortunately, they were available for lunch and dinner so with smiles we picked two.

We were spread out on the property, Peg and Frank in simple “guide tents” and guests in nicely designed chalets. The property had a lot of large shade trees and a pool, hammocks and lounge chairs, and Elephants walking by. It is not fenced and several times during our stay several big bulls waded through, their slow determined paths of choice going close to tables and tents with humans scattering to get out of the way.

In the afternoon we took our first game drive, over the bridge that traverses the Luangwa River and through the maze of pools and lagoons in this widest stretch of the Luangwa River Valley. Mature African Ebony and Natal Mahogany trees rimmed various pools and we found ourselves stopping often for birds new to us, and an elegant group of Thornicroft’s Giraffe, unique to this area. The group was standing in the road, so we just stopped and enjoyed a couple of big males approaching a large female, and several teenage-sized individuals following along. We watched them feed on small leaves, expertly pulling off greenery with their tongues. One wandered up a drainage and stuck its long neck down to examine an African Harrier Hawk which barely budged.





We found a troop of Banded Mongoose and spied Common Waterbuck and numerous birds including lovely White-fronted Bee-eaters and stately Saddle-billed Storks. Following a tip, we eventually caught up with a pride of lions that had taken down a Hippo the day before and were still chewing on it. Several were on the carcass keeping vultures at bay, one gnawing on a piece of skin as if it were a piece of jerky. Others seemed “meat-drunk” as they lounged close to the river, occasionally shifting position or getting up to greet each other on the way to procure more shade. There was one big male and a host of females and younger males.

We eventually left them and moved upriver a ways so we could get out and enjoy sundowners. We had a grand view of an area used by nesting African Skimmers and put our scopes on them as well as other shorebirds. We found our first Double-banded Sandgrouse and a host of shore and water birds as the sky turned a lovely pink. Ann was spotted pointing out birds with her gin and tonic in the pointing hand, and we had a good laugh at that. African Skimmers put on a good show, as did a local fisherman navigating between abundant Hippo. Red-eyed Doves called “I am, a Red-eyed Dove” and Water Thick-Knees gave off their descending notes, reminiscent of a North American Canyon Wren.

Returning to another great meal and evening at camp, we did some spotlighting, and found a Rusty-spotted Genet and an African Civet. We popped a Square-tailed Nightjar off the road, and Gerry pointed out the Southern Cross in a most brilliant sky.

Back at camp they had a welcoming fire in a pit, and tables set up for dinner under the arching trees. We enjoyed each other’s company before heading off to bed. An escort is needed any time after dark and at dawn due to the presence of animals in camp. Peg had a bull Elephant feeding on a tree just next to her porch much of the night, he came back each night so she named him her “boyfriend” and said it was a heartbeat challenge to have just a tent screen between you and such a mega beast; thankfully it seemed just intent on feeding. Those going back to the duplexes were escorted by Webster, and one night had a Leopard in view of his torch light.

## **Fri., Aug. 2      River Pools, Numerous Birds and Wild Dogs**

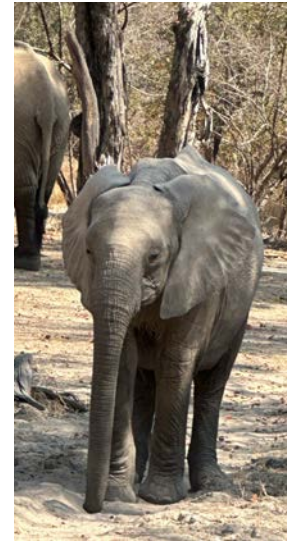
Bwala was our guide while in the park, and he knew the area well. We had great hopes of finding Wild Dog and he got several tips from colleagues and other guides. We looked at everything on our drive, but put ourselves in a position where we just might find them, heading to Katete Bridge and habitat onward.



They put out an early breakfast at the camp and in no time, we were on our way, spotting Swainson’s Spurfowl, White-crowned Lapwing, Collared Pratincole, Saddle-billed Stork, African Skimmer, both Brown and Banded Snake Eagles, an impressive family of Southern Ground Hornbill, a Bennett’s Woodpecker and numerous White-fronted and Little Bee-eaters. We passed a Hyena roaming, then groups of Impala, Warthogs and two big bull African Buffalo.

We surveyed small pools for water birds, and enjoyed the antics of White Helmetshrike gangs. Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and Lilac-breasted Roller were brilliant gems of this arid woodlands. We did not find the Wild Dogs as hoped for, but each African game drive holds discoveries. Our guide headed homeward via Kapiri Nkonde Hill, not far from Chichele Lodge, choosing this direction after seeing several vultures in the sky, then a Hooded Vulture on the side of the road. On a fresh but picked-clean buffalo carcass, we found vultures, Marabou Stork and nearby, against the trees resting, a pride of Lions. While watching the Lions and their interactions, excited for the photo opportunity, Gerry dropped his room key – a bit challenging for the guide to recover! We then found a troop of Baboons gleaming in the sun and numerous Buffalo Weaver nests. We took a local ferry across the river to circle back for lunch, and some saw a Puff Adder, a bit of an exciting reptilian find right at the parking lot as we disembarked. Lunch today included Boboti, a native dish of spiced lamb with butternut squash. Washed down with one of three varieties of Wild Dog brews inspired a nap for a few. Others enjoyed catching up on WiFi, relatively new here at the camp through Starlink.

We met back at 3 PM, heading out to follow the river for a ways, noting water birds, then turned inland to go try to find the unique subspecies of Zebra here (Crookson’s) and some other arid land species of note. We quickly found a stallion and herd of 3 individuals, enjoying watching their interactions and motion. We watched a herd of Cape Buffalo, a Giant Kingfisher bashing a fish on a log, and along the riparian just out of camp spotted a Verreaux’s Eagle in one of the huge mahogany trees. It was an afternoon of pools and waterbirds, small bird parties, good photos of Purple-crested Turacos and Rattling Cisticolas; 70 species of birds in total. We enjoyed sundowners on the river bank, this time without lions but with fifteen African Skimmers. We were thrilled to find Three-banded Courser on our night drive, as well as elephant shrews, and watched a leopard grooming her cub on our way back in.



### **Sat., Aug. 3                      Remote Reaches of South Luangwa National Park**

South Luangwa is a large park and while we drove a long way on this full day of exploring, we barely made a dent. We stopped at several pools catching sightings of huge Nile Crocodiles, African Jacana, Sacred Ibis and Saddle-billed Storks, then headed inland from the river, heading north past the Luwi Sand River to more arid parts of the park on this sun-bright morning.

Huge Baobab trees marked our horizon. Bwala hopped out to pick up the thirty-plus pound fruit of the Sausage Tree (*Kigelia africana*), cutting it open for us to see. We crossed some seasonally dry sand rivers, finding large mixed herds of Impala and Kudu in the grasslands. As we got back into well-spaced woodland, we had excellent views of a Tawny Eagle that came off a kill to land and pose in a tree. There were numerous Waterbuck. Peg spotted the first Wildebeest, and we found a few more, all at a distance but distinct. We also saw several regal Kudu males, one of the handsomest hooved mammals. Twelve Southern Ground Hornbills, both Black and Brown-crowned Tchagra, and good views of lovely Green-winged Pytilla were other highlights.

Luangwa National Park is a maze of oxbow lakes and pools, many isolated for some of the year from the main river channel. From the rift escarpment flow sand rivers that bring nutrients and sediments on their occasional flow. We stopped at several dry down pools full of crocs. Our turn-around point was Fish Eagle Lagoon, where we found over 100 Yellow-billed Storks feeding alongside almost 30 Nile Crocodile. A handful of waders were present as well, but our attention was quickly drawn to a big drama in which an African Fish Eagle attacked one of the storks, with the intent of having it disgorge a fish. The acrobatics of flight were amazing but we were relieved when the eagle backed off. Eagle drama continued for us though, when on the way back, an Immature Martial Eagle zoomed by our windshield, threading through our vehicle and a large shrub adjacent to the riverside at eye level, wow! We had 98 bird species in total this day.

We had enjoyed hearing about the Zambia Carnivore Project in Kafue, and Anna had offered to let us meet the Luangwa staff, which several of us were eager to do. At lunch under the shade trees, Kachama Banda described her work with the organization, providing an insight into the day to day of field work. Most of the staff are Zambian and highly trained; we were most impressed with this organization. We were interrupted by a massive bull elephant that wanted to stroll through, causing the waiter to have us get up quickly; thankfully, it just kept going on its merry way.

Luangwa is one of the more-visited parks of Zambia and several businesses have set up in the area, one of the most respected being Tribal Textiles. Several of us went down to their store, where they demonstrated how



their colorful works of art are made. There were so many colorful temptations displayed; a wonderful insight into local creativity and talent.

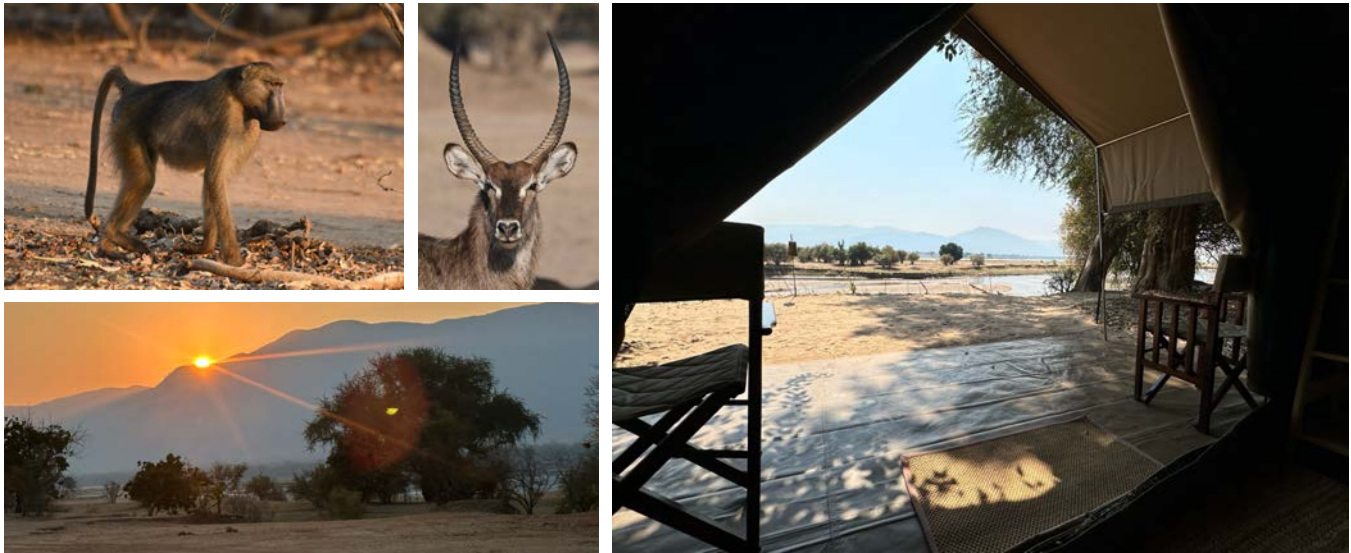
It was time to head back out, and we returned once again to the area the Wild Dogs had been frequenting. The Twin Baobab area was our landmark, but we failed to find them. We found ourselves at a Lion pride jam up, but there were too many vehicles too close to the animals for us, so we headed over to an open area with a view to set up our sundowners. Out came the table, bright cloth and provisions, and just as drinks were poured a friend of Bwala called with – a Wild Dog pack sighting. Could we make it before dark? Peg said, LET’S TRY! We threw the table back in the vehicle and made a dash, gin and tonics in hand, splashing at the bumps and laughing. We caught sight of the dogs just after sunset, arriving to watch the last of the group leave their resting bed site to head into the brush. Thankfully they did not go far, and in the spotlight, we could study six in total, all with unique color patterns. We knew how rare it is to find them and were appreciative of Bwala’s attentive efforts. Back to a lovely dinner at Flat Dogs Camp under huge trees, with stars above and bellows of Hippos providing camp music. This would be our last night in Zambia, and we were reluctant to bid it adieu.

### **Sun., Aug. 4 Flight to Lusaka and on to Harare, Zimbabwe**

We had one more morning drive, and a few things left on our list of species hoped to see. This morning we were trying for Pel’s Fishing Owl, first at a small pond near the entrance, and then at African Ebony grove where a Yellow Baboon troop was just waking up and we peacefully watched their antics and grooming. Though we did not find the Pel’s, we had a surprise visit from a Bat Hawk that was most impressive. A half dozen Black Crike and several Hamerkop were feeding and a tolerant Senegal Cuckoo let us get good views just off the road. We also saw a father jacana brooding its chicks – so dear to see. Luangwa National Park has been described as the Garden of Eden at the edge of the Rift Valley. The Luangwa River is one of unspoiled waterways left in Africa. We felt a great sense of peace this morning.

We returned for a quick brunch, then packed up. We took a scheduled flight from Mfuwe to Lusaka, then continued on to Harare. At Lusaka, we collected luggage and re-checked it for the international part of the trip; all went quite smoothly. On arrival, we cleared Immigration and Customs at Zimbabwe quickly and with no issues.

Accommodations at the delightful York Lodge awaited us, with turn of the century colonial architecture and gardens, an abundant art collection, all rimmed by a red brick wall covered with Bougainvillea flowers and vines. We would come and go from here to various places in Zimbabwe and it soon felt like home. Purple-crested Turacos were a common feeder bird here, often drinking out of the fountains! Our host Maggie Kay greeted us warmly and took our dinner orders so the staff had time to prepare. Night temperatures were cool and



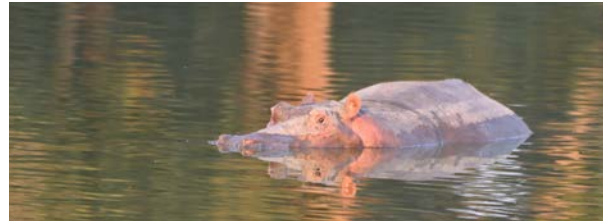
welcoming and the meal served outside on the patio was just delicious. We caught up our species list and headed off to bed.

## **Mon., Aug. 5    Flight to Mana Pools National Park**

After breakfast we headed to the Charles Prince Airport where we met our charter flight. We found a few birds along the runway including Crowned Lapwing, Capped Wheatear and Red-capped Lark. By 8 AM we were in the air, seeing Harare from the sky, then passing over extensive agricultural lands, some large dams and reservoirs and then observing wild country and the Zambezi River just before touch down. We chased a herd of Cape Buffalo off the runway before landing.

Our smiling guides from Stretch's Camp, Reuben and Tor, were waiting for us at the airstrip. We followed a sandy road through woodlands, then more open savanna, watching for birds and wildlife. One of our vehicles surprised a Wild Cat, and we all got to see Namaqua Doves. Smiling Jennifer was there to serve us tea and snacks by one of Mana's four large pools of permanent water that are amazing oases during the dry season. Mana Pools is one of the most picturesque parks in Southern Africa, with stunning large trees spaced wide apart with little understory. Trees include the lush and stately Albida Tree, also called Winter-thorn or Apple-ringed Acacia (*Faidherbias albida*). Eland and Kudu keep them trimmed from below, and many animals depend on their abundant fruit production. Mana Pools is famous for Elephants that have learned to stand on their hind legs, pushing up to reach the fruits. Other animals wait for baboons to knock them down or follow the Elephant bulls for any extras. They have tap roots that go down 120 feet or more, so appear lush even in drought times. Other trees include Zambezi Fig (*Ficus bussei*), Sausage Tree (*Kigelia africana*) and Natal Mahogany (*Trichilia emetica*). Between these giants, there is an open, park-like feel with easy viewing that allows for walking safaris to be possible, something we looked forward to in the coming days. The pool was bustling with birds, and we were excited to see a flock of mixed Bat-like and Mottled Spinetails. We found a Rufous-bellied Heron along with many Yellow-billed Stork and a statue-like Goliath Heron that would indeed be there as we passed day after day; quite the sentinel!

We checked into our tented camp, located on the Zambezi River. It was absolutely bush chic, a beautiful camp with a light footprint right on the river. It is a seasonal camp, put up each year on sand, soft enough one can walk barefoot to and from our lovely tents complete with furniture, private baths with outdoor showers and a view of the stars. The central public relaxation area is complete with a bar, library books and deck overlooking the river.



The owner, Stretch Ferreira, is himself a legend here, having spent his lifetime in the bush in various roles from park ranger to bush soldier in the Rhodesian War. A comrade of many past adventures joined him this season, Alistair. Both are native to Zimbabwe and both enjoy lively discussions and telling stories. At this stage of their careers, they enjoy behind the scenes tracking and scouting, covering over 10 kilometers a day looking for a particular bull Elephant, a pack of Wild Dog, or activity of Lions. Stretch has a remarkable way with animals and has a comfort level walking around high bull Elephants few can equal. He would also introduce us to a wild Spotted Hyena named Hazel, who has visited his camp for multiple seasons, bringing her young to a nightly ritual of looking for scraps.

Dinners here were very special; each night a theme décor was centered on the table and food was particularly savory. Tonight's was steak tenderloin, pearl onions, potatoes, and veggies with a scrumptious dessert.

## **Tues., Aug. 6 Mana Pools National Park**

Mana Pools, with its stately open riverine forests along the Zambezi, was declared a 1988 UNESCO World Heritage Site, part of the Middle Zambezi Biosphere Reserve. Despite its global reputation, poaching was rampant here and the park is still recovering from losing 40% of its Elephant population in the 1970's/80's. Away from the river there is a mix of Mopane forest and Combretum shrub thickets.

We left this morning and passed by two of the pools, admiring reflections, the feeding antics of African Spoonbill, "Nancy's" (Goliath) Heron, Glossy Ibis, and a wonderful scene where Great and Yellow-billed Herons fed from perches on a Hippo's back, as long as it was wide, as it waded past a Nile Crocodile. Leaving the pools, we wound through woodlands, watching Eland herds with young grazing with Impalas, and large troops of Yellow Baboons. They could see a long way so were comfortable on the ground, grooming and backlit by the sun and we could not resist stopping to photograph them.

Birding was great! We found a tree cavity being investigated by Lesser Honeyguide, Black-headed Oriole, and other species catching bees. An African Hoopoe called and posed, a flock of noisy Retz' Helmetshrikes came by, as did Green Woodhoopoes and a pair of Common Scimitarbill. Each day Jennifer would meet us for tea, provisioned with coffee and tea - sandwiches, cookies, and cake. One could get used to this safari life.

At one of the pools, we stopped to view big numbers of Marabou Storks. Frank with his keen eyes spotted Nyala, a group of three -- two females and young. These are elusive and hard to find and we were thrilled.



Back at camp for lunch and a break, we had a long view of the river with Common Waterbuck on the sandbars. Hippos marching out of the water, Elephants with young, Spur-winged Goose, Knob-billed Duck, Warthogs and Impala sprinting over logs...

We gathered to leave for the afternoon, but a BIG bull Elephant came to tea and put on a show, drinking water and swooshing it out of the trunk like a fire nozzle before our eyes. Nancy described it as gargling. We still had hopes of finding a Pel's Fishing Owl so we walked from camp. We went with Stretch, who would much rather be finding Wild Dogs (he's not located them now for over a week and suspects they've gone south to one of the private reserves) or Lions (we opted for owls) or his beloved Boswell, largest of the grand Elephants. We walked in and out of massive trees, scanning each for Pel's. These are big Natal Mahogany and Zambesi Fig trees and we walked from the river to the lagoon. No Pel's, but numerous waterbirds, a few songbirds we'd not spied before, and at the lagoon, Hippos. We looked off towards the escarpment at the edge of the river with our sundowners, joined by a lone mother Elephant and calf. Back for hot showers and time to freshen up before a delicious dinner of chicken in red wine sauce, sautéed mushrooms, veggies, and rice. Sticky pudding for dessert. A Wild Dog theme is on the table landscape tonight and these little beaded versions are for sale in the gift cupboard (Peg goes home with a pack).

Those who wished gathered around the campfire; here we were immersed totally in the African wilds and we loved it.

### **Wed. Aug. 7 Mana Pools National Park**

One more full day here – time was going fast and we already felt this is precious. Once we leave here, we leave the safari portion of our trip, and move into the highlands. So, we savored sunrise, bundled up in the chill of morning, hot coffee by the fire in hand. Porridge with fruit was available early, and then off we went. We drove out past Saddle-billed Stork, African Fish Eagle and numerous waterbirds.

We were on a mission to find Crested Guinea fowl, so changed habitat to a thicket/woodland mix and drove over red sandy soil not far from the airstrip. We had success and felt happy to find them. We had tea by the Marabou Pool, where we watched Kudu, Impala, Elephants and a family of Arrow-marked Babblers. We enjoyed woodland birding as our list was approaching 200 species just in Zimbabwe. We soaked in the beauty, enjoyed tea and wound our way back to Camp.



This afternoon we were offered a walking safari, a nice change of pace, and four of our group opted to walk with the big bull Elephants so well known to Stretch. The big Elephant boss is Boswell; he is at least 45 years old and his massive tusks almost drag the ground. He was the first bull to reach up, then stand on two legs to reach higher, pulling down branches of large Albida trees to get the nutrient-rich seed pods. Some of these trees may be 300+ years old, and produce 30-40kg of fruit each year. Timed with the dry season it's an essential food resource.

To start the walk we all drove around, searching for Boswell. We found mixed herds of Kudu, Eland and Impala all gathering below these giant crowns, troops of baboons up in the branches eating messily and dropping fruits down. A half dozen big bulls in Mana Pools have followed Boswell's example, and we do find them. Our walkers got behind two younger bulls, still massive, and Boswell in all his glory. They walked right alongside these giants, with Stretch coaching them, constantly talking to the animals he knows so well. At one point one got anxious, having fallen behind the other three, and Stretch said, "sit down". He explained that the elephants can see you better on the ground, but it got a bit tense as one sniffed Marjorie and left a swath of elephant snot on her shirt. It was a remarkable experience with a mix of fear and marvel all blended in.

Peg and Carol chose to game drive, finding a handsome male Eland, more big elephants, and the season's first spot of Carmine Bee-eater. We also got some nice photos of the walkers, but alas, still no Wild Dogs.

We met back at camp for sundowners on the deck as light painted the sky and its river reflections orange, mauve, and pink. Stretch cooked a BBQ tonight, a mixed meat grill plus corn and veggies. We chatted about conservation, African politics, and stories from the bush. The Southern Cross constellation hung bright when we turned to our tents to call it a night. Hippo grunts and Spotted Hyena wails resounded into the night.

## **Thurs., Aug. 8 Return to Harare | York Lodge**

This was the last morning of the safari section of our journey so we greeted dawn feeling a bit bittersweet. Impala and Waterbuck were down drinking while Hamerkop, Black-winged Stilt and Glossy Ibis were avidly feeding.

After breakfast and good-byes to this wonderful staff, we headed out, selecting to spend time around Long Pool, the largest available waterhole. The first viewpoint was recognizable as we had enjoyed tea here on the way in. African Spoonbills and Yellow-billed Storks fed avidly, dodging Nile Crocodiles that were piled up 20 deep on sandbars. We found a Black-crowned Night Heron and watched a Three-banded Plover work the near shore.





Frank spotted a huge buffalo herd at the far end drinking, and we headed their way for closer inspection. En route, Tor spotted two Three-banded Coursers holding tight to the ground, perhaps on eggs.

The buffalo herd was at least 100 strong, mostly females with calves. They had finished drinking when we intercepted them. They were wary and stuck close together, finally breaking into a trot and kicking up dust - quite a sight!

Rueben then spotted a Nyala bull behind them, making its way to the river to drink. We paralleled its motion, watching it weave in and out of dead tree trunks and leafed-out shrubs of the flood plain. We got to the river first, parked and sat quietly, and were rewarded with time to watch it come in, settle by a water pool, and take a good, long drink. It had striking markings with a white ruff down the back, facial markings, body stripes, and orange “socks” extending up to its knees.

Jennifer had tea and coffee, sandwiches and cookies waiting for us, but first we had to stop as this time, returning on the same route, the Three-banded Coursers were standing. Underneath them? Two tiny but mobile chicks. They ranked high on the adorable scale!

Moving on through the woodlands toward the airstrip we had our first Crested Francolin cross the road. Peg called it back from the thick brush and we got good looks at the edge, and crossing the road. Jasper, the pilot, was waiting with our chartered Cessna Caravan, and soon we were aloft. What a morning!

We had lunch at the York Hotel on the patio, in view of Purple-crested Turacos coming in a bird bath two and three at a time, wow! We had a free afternoon to repack, regroup and refresh at this lovely oasis full of blooming shrubs and lovely art and furnishings.

## **Fri., Aug. 9      Scenic Drive to the Vumba Mountains**

We enjoyed breakfast with fresh blueberries and fresh omelets, interrupted by some great birds including Purple Crested Turaco, Eastern Miombo Sunbird, a calling Whyte’s Barbet and Greater Blue Eared Starlings. We could store a few things at York Lodge as we would return, and said our good-byes to the friendly staff.

We traveled by mini-bus with our destination five to six hours away - the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe. It was our first look at the city of Harare in more detail and it was busy, with lots of commerce, markets and quite a



few modern buildings, malls, shops, and nice residential areas. Once out of the city, we passed a mix of agricultural areas and then woodlands as we started to climb in elevation. Our break was at a historic site called the Halfway House, serving travelers for over 100 years. They had a few shops and some nice coffee and we spied a few birds before heading on to the other larger city we'd pass through, Mutare, a place of commerce as this road leads into Mozambique which has ocean ports for goods to ship through. The city was bustling, but easy to navigate with wide streets; in general, looking quite prosperous.

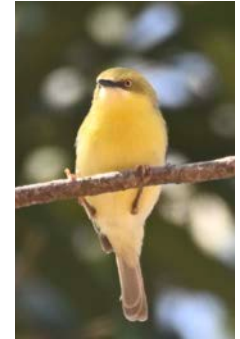
After we left Mutare we started to climb more, and the Miombo trees of the woodlands were in their time of color, not fall color but color timed with the coming onset of rains. Reddish colors protect growing tissue in the new leaves, but for us it gave the effect of driving through a New England autumn, quite lovely! It was not all that long until we were turning into the drive of our lodge.

How welcome was the lush natural forest around Seldom Seen Lodge and knowing we'd have several days here! Hosts Ken and Sue met us with big smiles, cake and tea, and we had time for a walk on the property with Buluwezi, the local and quite talented bird guide. He started off strong, showing us the nest of a Lemon Dove and a pair of Olive Bushshrikes, both regional specialties. The property has numerous trails and a small pond, and we found sought-after species like Robert's Warbler and Chirinda Apalis that first afternoon, as well as Stripe-cheeked Greenbul. The property supports a greenhouse and nursery as well as the guest lodge and we enjoyed seeing orchids, proteas and other plantings.

Sue made us a filling lasagna with veggies on the side and ice-cream for dessert. Our rooms were simple but comfortable and it was just our group as we filled all available rooms. The night skies were clear and full of stars, temperatures quite cool for perfect sleeping weather. We caught up our bird and mammal checklist by the cozy main house fireplace. At 5000 feet elevation, nighttime and mornings were brisk!

### **Sat., Aug. 10 & Sun., Aug. 11 Seldomseen | Bvumba Mountains**

We had two days to enjoy this part of Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands. The first morning we walked the property in more detail with numerous highlights including Tambourine Doves, numerous Livingstone's Turacos, Mottled Swifts, scope views of White-eared Barbets and Cape Batis, furtive Black-fronted Bushshrikes and a lightning quick view of Malachite Sunbird. After meandering through the property, we walked up a quiet road to take in a fine view from a neighboring property, looking down the escarpment into Mozambique where we could see a big reservoir in the distance.



The second morning we drove out a ways to bird in the drier Miombo Forest. Sadly views were not what they could be due to all the fires in the region, on both sides of the border. We'd watched the sunrise come up bright red and it did not clear much at all this day. But new birds cheered us on, though we worked for them, first along a road, then up and around a forest trail. We found Gray Waxbills feeding down by the road, then farther off the road on a trail we were pleased to find a regional specialty, the Spotted Creeper. In this same area we teased up a Singing Cisticola, watched two Black Cuckooshrikes fly in, and Peg spotted another specialty here, the Cabani's Bunting. Frank was really pleased to find Miombo Rock Thrush. A bit farther up the road, on a quest to find Miombo Tit (which we would do the next day) we instead found Retz's Helmetshrikes in a noisy group, putting on quite a show. A few got views of Jameson Firefinch and all zeroed in on Green-capped Eremomela. Over the granite monoliths we stopped for an Auger Buzzard on the wing. The habitat looked so promising we'd visit again our departure morning, this time finding Red-faced Crombec and a pair of cooperative Miombo Tit.

Our second afternoon we headed to the nearby botanical gardens which proved to be very extensive. It was Sunday of a 4-day holiday weekend and busy with a wedding, but we had good views of Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, Black-tailed Waxbills and Yellow-streaked Greenbuls. Excellent views of Gray Cuckooshrikes and Black-fronted Bushshrikes were a treat. We wound our way down to a pond where several male Bronze Sunbirds were displaying. We worked the forest edge for skulking Swynnerton's Robins, hearing them often and seeing some quick flights of passage across the trail. We did see a mad dash by a Blue Duiker as it exploded from the brush we were surveying for the robin.

We made a loop walk back to our vehicle and watched dazzling Livingstone's Turacos fly across a forest opening with their lime green and red plumage gleaming in the last light of the day. White-necked Ravens were on patrol and flocks of Black Saw-wings were constant overhead in small number.

Starlink had recently brought internet to this remote area and several of us clustered by the office upon our return, using the signal to catch up on news, which in this election year for the USA was getting pretty spicy. Marjorie got Wordle on the first try, inspired by the homemade blueberry scones we'd had that morning, she started with that word and won – fun!

By now the lodge felt like home. Ken had been to town and purchased some good local mountain coffee for



those who wanted to take some home. Sue made a delicious chicken stew with peanut in the sauce, with roasted potatoes and fresh garden veggies and for dessert, a delicious apple crumble. Wine and beer were available as an honor bar tab, and we enjoyed this around the fire in the cozy fireplace room. We appreciated the art they had in various rooms. Ken had a national park service career and Sue a professional botanist's so a stay with them is perfect for inquisitive naturalists.

## **Mon., Aug. 12 Honde Valley | Nyanga National Park**

Today, after a full breakfast that included leftover apple crumble at Peg's request, we headed on to the Honde Valley, one of the premier birding spots in Zimbabwe, a drive of about 75 miles. Ken and Sue's daughter Norine and husband Lloyd manage the next property we would stay at, a former country club now a lodge in the Honde Valley.

The air was hazy with smoke from fires in the bush particularly strong coming from neighboring Mozambique, but we passed interesting granite monoliths along the way, and saw more of the colored leaves of the new growth in the Miombo woodlands. We went into the southern section of Nyanga National Park to see the second highest waterfall in Africa, Mutarazi Falls. This proved to be the only real bust of the trip, one that Carol aptly predicted due to the drought conditions and haze. The dirt road in to the park was full of potholes from heavy logging traffic, and the scenery was that of highland forests largely transformed to tree plantations many decades ago. We bumped and lurched past clearcuts. At the falls Frank, who had not been there in a long time, found out that during the pandemic they had put in a zipline and sky walkway, charging additional admission for both, and blocking off the loop trail that used to afford views. As the water level of the falls was also low from regional drought, we cut our visit short and headed on, thankfully on a better road for our exit. A Peregrine Falcon, spotted by Ann, was our lone new bird for the area.

We were happy to find the road junction down to the Honde Valley and the scenery was soon quite sublime, a mix of green of every shade as tea plantations blended in with native forest at many levels as we descended almost 2500 feet below the escarpment that we had been on at the falls.

Aberfoyle is a cherished spot for Zimbabwean travelers, with wonderful views, native forest in the glens and gullies, and a delightful climate. There is history here, a feeling of old money in an oasis that escaped a lot of the land turnover and turmoil of past decades. Built fairly recently in 1960 for the tea estate executives, the house



and its 9-hole golf course have been converted to a lodge but remain part of a company that includes prosperous agriculture endeavors including extensive tea fields, vineyards and avocados. It's a birder's paradise - each room has the name of a bird and inside artwork and a description of its life history. And outside one watches Palm Nut Vultures and Lizard Buzzards on the wing, and colorful lizards on the bark of big shade trees.

## **Tues., Aug. 13 Nyanga National Park**

This morning we met Morgan, the knowledgeable guide of the lodge, and he impressed us right away. Just outside by our cabins he showed us two species of Twinspot, Peter's and Green-breasted. A pair of Peter's were coming in to feed on a bit of seed, making our photographers very happy. The Green-breasted is a canopy species, challenging in morning light, but a little flock of six afforded us views.

We had a banner morning, with high levels of bird activity in a stunning landscape. We drove a short way through the estate, passing huge piles of eucalyptus firewood grown, harvested and cut to dry the tea. The light on this intricate landscape that morning was exquisite, and we'll long remember the shine of verdant tea. One of the highlights was finding a male Narina Trogon in forests that wound through the hillsides of tea, separating the crops like mortar on tile. We heard the trogon first, then found it as it was intent on feeding and we were able to watch it for several minutes. We got flight views, frontal and rear with its iridescent back feathers gleaming in morning light. We also saw Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and a family of Green-backed Woodpeckers. The hillsides full of tea plants dated from the 50's and 60's, still a beautiful and productive mosaic against the native forest. We walked the edges and saw close to 60 species that morning including a Wood Owl that took some scope acrobatics to admire as it was right above our heads. We also fit in a visit to the manager's hillside home, meeting their young son and friendly dog, with time to admire the views and birds.

In the afternoon several of the group gave in to the urge to just relax, we'd been going hard for several weeks now. Others walked around the edge of the golf course, admiring views and sorting through mixed flocks of birds and admiring the local cattle.

We gathered to tally up our swelling bird list, adding in some mammals and lizards today. Frank went over what species were unique to the highland region, then went over others throughout our journey that were tightly tied to a certain habitat or range restricted and special to find. The afternoon had cleared with some blue skies and tonight the stars were radiant.



## Wed., Aug. 14 Nyanga National Park

This was our earliest wake-up of the trip, as we were heading to much lower elevation in search of a special bird, the Lesser Seedcracker. We would bird in several patches that contained the sedge seeds they feed on. Round and round and round the patch we walked, finding other new species: Pale Batis, African Firefinch, and Red-winged Prinia. Frank and Morgan tried going into the thick grass to flush it quietly uphill; they got glimpses but it remained furtive. A Klaas's Cuckoo brightened up the morning.

Early on we had gotten good looks at Yellow-throated Longclaw, African Yellow Warbler, and Moustached Grass Warbler. Overhead, we found Dickenson's Kestrel, Ovampo Sparrowhawk, a Bat Falcon (third for our trip), Lizard Buzzard, and Wahlberg's Eagle.

It was Day 19 on our journey, and this afternoon three elected to just relax, enjoy the ambiance of Aberfoyle Estate, catch up on news, and refresh before the final segment of our trip.

The rest of us went with Morgan to check on a nest of Ayer's Hawk Eagles which we reached by hiking through hillsides of tea. The native forest was lush with massive trees, several in bloom. The nest was not active, but we enjoyed listening to skulker species and watching sunbirds. Walking back across the golf course, three Mountain Wagtails were tussling, one in full tail-wagging display.

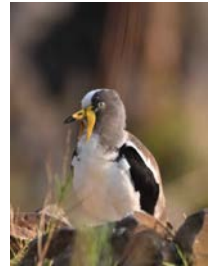
From here we drove to another lush forest in a ravine behind Macadamia plantings. Two African Broadbills teased us, coming close and calling but staying firmly out of view. A male Narina Trogon was much more cooperative, perching and doing short flights to give us views. Near dusk we saw two more African Wood Owls, nice!

Dinner was a choice of chicken, braised short ribs or stuffed butternut squash filled with broccoli puree and lots of fresh veggies from the estate gardens. For dessert, sticky toffee pudding with ice-cream.

## Thurs., Aug. 15 Return to Harare | York Lodge

We lingered, admiring the mountain views after a nice full breakfast at the lodge. A Palm Nut Vulture flew over as a great send-off bird.

We stopped for views alongside Nyanga National Park, taking photos of the Miombo woodlands in full spring



color skirting the edges of striking granite monoliths. A flock of Scarce Swifts flew overhead, our second sighting of this notable species on our trip.

Our destination was Froggy Farm Coffee Shop and protea farm where we had a tip that Guerneys Sugarbird was active and indeed it was. Carol was the first to spot it and got all of us on it right away. It was clear it loved feeding in the proteas in bloom, so in time we all had terrific views of this highland species, one of only two in an endemic African family. We celebrated with fresh coffees at this delightful roadside stop in the mountains.

It was then time to retrace our steps, with lunch planned at the Halfway House where we'd stopped before, followed by time in a local park we'd eyed coming over due to its fabulous geology. Gosho Park has good Miombo habitat and we were pleased that almost right out of the minibus we spied a Lanner Falcon, perched atop one of the granite features. We got into a very active "bird party" that included Miombo Tit, Southern Hyliota, African Penduline-Tit, Pale Flycatcher, and a group of Black-eared Seedeaters. It's always exciting to find new birds up until the very last day, the last late afternoon of the last day. We paid for this a bit by hitting rush hour traffic, so getting to York Lodge was slow, but once there our angst evaporated with their wonderful hospitality and dinner on the porch overlooking the gardens.

## **Fri., Aug. 16 - 18      Victoria Falls Extension**

Our full group continued on the extension to Victoria Falls today, not wanting to miss one of the scenic wonders of the world. We took a short morning flight and headed directly to this treasured World Heritage Site. We had a local guide, Mike, who shared some of the history of Livingstone and his travels, also some of the geology and significance of the falls, but it was hard to focus with so much beauty and energy flowing all around us. He reminded us that Zambia has the falls but Zimbabwe has the view and this was sure true.

The park has a good trail system with multiple viewpoints, each one looking over to the lava that massive amounts of water, even in this drought, pours over so spectacularly. We got close enough to feel the spray, and loved watching Trumpeter Hornbills fly the canopy. The forest at the edge of the falls on either side is called a rainforest and it's lush; in almost constant spray from the falls trees are large and covered with plants. We watched small birds have a fit about a Little Sparrowhawk perched there, and watched Red-winged Starling, a family of Black-collared Barbets and numerous Yellow-bellied Greenbuls. We had ample time and met up again by the park entry gate, where shops and a restaurant are located.



We then went to a local restaurant, the Lookout, that has a view of the gorge. We had a terrific lunch, but few birds were present; though it looked ideal for vultures and birds of prey, we had to be content with Rock Martins, new for the trip. We left very full, and checked into our B and B, a modern and delightful accommodation in a residential area of town.

We were due out on a sunset cruise on the Zambezi River and this turned out to be a great choice for the afternoon as it was so relaxing and productive. There were others on the boat but they seemed amenable to our excitement at seeing birds. We found an African Finfoot under tree branches overhanging the river, several Water Thick-knees and White-crowned Lapwings, a few African Jacanas and an African Darter, sunning itself in that classic wing-stretched position. Trumpeter Hornbills went up and down the river, Wire-tailed Swallows almost landed on the boat, and Peg got very excited to spot a lone Rock Pratincole, which the captain was good about getting closer to. We saw an Elephant grazing in a cove of the river, and filled up on drinks and hors d'oeuvres which were included with the adventure. Ours was one of the smaller boats on the river, which had a veritable jam-up of guests slugging sundowners; we were happy we could be so maneuverable and we watched in view of a sand beach full of African Skimmers. We wine and dined so we decided to skip our planned dinner, and just go back and catch up on our list and some sleep.

The next day we left early with a packed breakfast and checked into the national park. Our guide, Golf, thinking we were birders, wanted to take us along the river, but in turn told us of some intriguing mammals he had seen the day before in another section of the park. As we'd seen so much along the river and it was more similar to what we had done, we made a quick turn-around to visit the Chamabonda side and were so glad we did. This is a grassland area, and we had good looks at over 30 species of birds, including Golden-breasted Bunting. Yellow-billed Hornbills posed for us and, new for the trip, Magpie Shrike perched and then flew, revealing their startling black and white pattern. We saw a Steinbok, also new, and our first of the trip Black-backed Jackal, a species very common in other parts of Africa. We were scanning and scanning for Kori Bustard which normally parades around a grassy area of the drive, but found instead an inquisitive herd of Sable. They were so beautiful, keenly interested in something to the east (Lions?) but eventually got back to feeding. We saw Elephants, Kudu, and the tracks of the historic railroad that used to run from Cairo to Cape Town. Gray Go-away-birds were common here; in fact, several of the species we'd had at Kafue National Park at the stop were seen again – as the crow flies it's not all that far away and we had come full circle. We got some nice shots of Lilac-breasted Roller (who can resist them?) and Meve's Starling glistening in the sun. We returned to enjoy lunch at a café just across from the B & B.

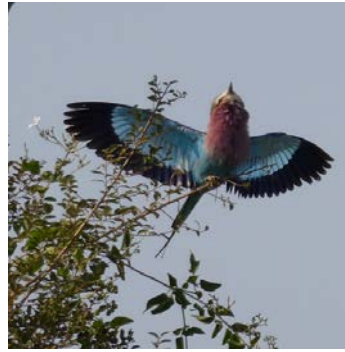




The afternoon was promised as free time, though several activities were possible in town. Peg and Carol asked Golf if we might possibly return to Chambobonda for one last safari drive. Gerry and Marjorie relaxed and got packed up, and Nancy and Ann had fun shopping and visiting the beautiful historic hotel Peg had stayed at on a previous occasion years before. Golf was free, and we left with high spirits, bound to find that Kori Bustard and more. Juanita, a female guide in training, joined us to gain some experience. We just may have turned her into a birder as we were thrilled to find Bradfield's Hornbills, Crowned Lapwings, Lizard Buzzards, both Little and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Cape Starlings and a few more Golden-breasted Buntings. At one of the ponds, we saw Lappet-faced Vulture and Tawny Eagle, along with Black Storks and a Red-billed Ducks. Most importantly we found four Kori Bustards and two Secretary Birds, the latter in our final moments driving back, already up in the lone tree of the grassland we'd frequented, on their night roost. Golf brought along some sundowners for us and it felt a bit bittersweet to raise our glass of wine in a toast to the last day, for the two of us who so firmly agree that "Happiness is a Safari Drive".

After the toast, we knew we were running a bit late and really needed to get back to the gate, but Africa had other intentions. We paused at a known Spotted Hyena den and approaching dusk two six-month old cubs came out to play. Next, near the last two waterholes between us and the gate we encountered over 100 Elephants, mothers with young, one of which was not going to let us pass. We waited and waited, then urged her on, and thankfully she took the nudge though not without giving us a decidedly loud ear slap. Picking up speed, we rounded the next road bend faster only to slam on the brakes, between two large bull Elephants. Carol said, "I'm glad we are not in Kafue". Golf must navigate this Elephant waterhole passage many times a month, but for us being so close, and having the larger bull both in the road and dangling his "fifth leg" was a bit testy. Golf watched his body language and when he moved one foot, turned a tiny bit toward the bush, we made a dash. Under an almost full moon we dashed the rest of the way, checking out of the gate without problems.

We met up with our comrades for our farewell dinner at a most unique and delightful place, the Dusty Road. The owner set up the restaurant to employ local people, and we were shown some of the traditional medicinal plants and foods. Several traditional dishes cooked on an open fire were on the menu, Nancy even tried the fried Mopane Worms! The place radiated with warmth, history and sharing. Local school kids came and sang. There were handicrafts and books to purchase, and the owner was personable and delightful in greeting us. Every bit of décor was recycled or hand-crafted, rich with African colors and patterns. We were so glad that Mana, our operator and host in Zimbabwe, had booked us in to this popular and special place.



On August 18, we had time to pack up, enjoy a nice cooked breakfast and make our flights going out to Johannesburg and Cape Town to link to flights home. What a grand adventure, with so much learned and experienced!

*Photos: Silvery-cheeked Hornbill (Peg Abbott), Swallow-tailed Bee-eater (PA), White-browed Robin Chat (Nancy Bissinger - NB), Spectacled Weaver (NB), Blue Waxbill (NB), Brown-hooded Kingfisher (PA), Finfoot (PA), Scenic (Ann Rilling - AR), Half-collared Kingfisher (PA), Nile Crocodile young (PA), Birding the river (AR), Greater Kudu feeding (PA), Little Bee-eater (PA), Arrow-marked Babbler (PA), Elephants browsing (PA), Peter's Twinspot (PA), Hippos (PA), Martial Eagle (PA), Bohm's Bee-eater (NB), Hamerkop (PA), Leopard (PA), Warthogs (NB), Collared Sunbird (PA), Leopard snarl (PA), Lion female drinking (PA), Olive Woodpecker (NB), Wattled Crane nest (PA), Safari Walk (AR), Hippos (AR), Giraffe (NB), Safari Drive (PA), Lions lounging (PA), Zebras (PA), Elephant Brown-hooded Kingfisher (PA), Gray Heron (PA), Pied Kingfisher (PA), African Buffalo (PA), Purple-crested Turaco (PA), Scenic (AR), Sunset (PA), African Fish Eagle chasing Yellow-billed Stork (PA), Baby Elephant (PA), Game Drive (PA), Elephant (PA), Mana Pools Campsite (PA), Baboon (NB), Meves's Starling (NB), Crested Francolin (PA), Yellow Billed Stork (NB), Elephant Stretch to Eat (AR), Livingstone's Turaco Harare (PA), African Buffalo (AR), A+ Guides (PA), Plane (PA), Silvery-cheeked Hornbill (PA), Scenic (AR), Retz Helmetshrike (PA), Kurrucane Thrush (NB), Yellow-breasted Apalis (NB), Bridge Scenic (AR), Reptile in tree (AR), Scenic (AR) Tree Agama (NB), Scenic Banner (AR), Gurney's Sugarbird (NB), Brubru (NB), Rock Formation (AR), White-crowned Lapwing (NB), Victoria Falls (AR), Red-billed Hornbill (PA), Gray-Go-Away-Bird (PA), Yellow-billed Hornbill (PA), Lilac-breasted Roller (PA), Capped Wheatear (NB), Forktail drongo (NB), Sable Antelope (NB), Hyena (AR), Victoria Falls Scenic (AR), Sable at stream (Carol Lively - CL), Lilac-breasted Roller (CL), Sharpe's Grysbok (CL), Secretary Birds (CL), Gurney's Sugarbird (CL)*