

Dear All,

I just came back from a 16 days trip through Central Mozambique and Eastern Zimbabwe. The trip was organized by Reach Africa (Grahame Snow). The trip was highly successful and we saw a total of 350 bird species. I managed to get 27 new lifers (I had been to Zimbabwe before). Kevin Forsberg (a +700 birder) managed to get no less than 50 lifers on the trip! 50 was a good number for him since he will turn 50 tomorrow. Happy birthday Kevin! :-). I also managed to get 33 photo lifers on the trip



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### **Day 1 Rio Savane (Jul 30):**

I started from Cape Town very early on a flight to Johannesburg. At O.R. Tambo, I met with the other 3 participants.

Grahame's wife Charmaine helped us book in to the flight destined for Beira. We arrived in Beira early afternoon and could tick our first bird from the airplane.

**Collared Pratincoles** were flying around the airport and roosting on the grass and tarmac. Grahame met us at the airport and we were soon on our way to our camp. We did some birding on the road to Rio Savane camp and could quickly tick several

**Saddle-billed Storks, Black-crowned Tchagra, Rufous-winged Cisticola, African Marsh-Harrier** and a **juvenile Black-chested Snake-Eagle**. We stopped in a small forest on the way and could hear but not see Tiny Greenbul and Black-headed Apalis. However, we got good sightings of several **Green Malkoha**. In order to get to the camp, you need to take a boat. By the time we came to the crossing, the rain was pouring down badly. During an interlude in the rain, we managed to cross the river and install ourself in our rustic camp. Despite the rain, we were all quite enthusiastic.

### **Day 2 Rio Savane (Jul 31)**

We decided to bird the camp before breakfast. several common birds including a **Tropical Boubou** were seen. After breakfast we crossed the river again heading for the same forest patch we visited the day before. On the way we again saw several **Saddle-billed Storks** + a **Wolly-necked Stork**. I also managed to get my first pictures of an **African Quailfinch**. We decided to head for a local prawn factory to check out the pans there. The rain was still pouring down and we were mostly confined to birding from the car. Nothing special turned up at the prawn site. Continuing to the forest, we had good views of both a **Dark-chanting Goshawk** and a **Palm-nut Vulture**. When we got to the forest, the rain had finally let go. The forest birds were still not playing along, but we managed to get good views of a **Red-throated Twinspot**. We decided to go and look for some other birds in the wetland area and as we drove out the forest, Grahame suddenly hit the brakes hard. He looked at us all and whispered "Pel's Fishing-Owl". We all thought it was a joke, but sure enough, there it was a **Pel's Fishing Owl** sitting in the fork of a tree far away from any rivers or water bodies! We spent some time admiring this beautiful bird

before we headed towards the grassland that now by all the rain had turned out to be a wetland. Soaking wet we trashed through the grassland and managed to flush several **Short-tailed Pipits** and **Black-rumped Buttonquails**. Our hope was to also find a Locust Finch, but that bird eluded us on our entire trip. I choose to walk on dryer land back to the car and came upon some **Pale Batis** and also a **Rufous-bellied Heron**. Heading back to camp we got very good views of a **Pallid Honeyguide**. While waiting for the boat to take us across we also saw a **Mangrove Kingfisher**.

### Day 3 Rio Savane - Msasa Forest, Chinizua (Aug 1)

We also did some birding around camp this morning, but nothing special showed up. After breakfast we crossed the river and was soon on our way to our next destination. En route, we came across several **Southern Banded and Brown Snake-Eagles**. When we stopped for lunch we came across a very nice Miombo bird party. The best bird of that party was a **Green-backed Honeybird**. A short while after we saw **Stierling's Wren-Warbler**, **Black-eared Seed-eater** and **Miombo Blue-eared Starling**. At dinner that night in the Msasa camp, we were entertained by a pair of **African Wood-Owls**.



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### Day 4 Msasa Forest, Chinizua (Aug 2)

We had a very unusual alarm clock this morning in the form of an **African Broadbill** that was singing his heart out outside our camp. While we gathered for a walk in the forest, a **Plain-backed Sunbird** also participated in the chorus. A short walk in the forest yielded **East Coast Acalat**, **Black-headed Apalis** and our first sighting of **Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrike**. After breakfast we got in the car to explore another part of the forest. We soon hooked up with **Red-winged Warbler** and more of the common Miombo birds. A little later in another bird party we managed to get a **Green-backed Woodpecker**. On the way back to camp we got our first (of many) sightings of **Southern Ground Hornbills**.

### Day 5 Msasa Forest, Chinizua - Catapu (Aug 3)

No Broadbills this morning, but a walk down an almost empty river bed finally gave us a view of a **Tiny Greenbull**. On the way back for breakfast we saw a **Speckle-Throated Woodpecker**. After breakfast we birded the forest out to the main road. Following a bird party through the forest, we looked up and saw 2 **Ayres's Hawk-Eagles** displaying above. Another bird party yielded a **Cabanis Bunting** and another **Green-backed Woodpecker**. The main road towards Catapu was in a very bad condition. We stopped several times, but did not pick up anything special before we got closer to Catapu. At one place we got **Orange-winged Pytilia** and our first **Livingstone's Flycatcher**. Before we headed to the camp Grahame knew a place for **Silvery-cheeked Hornbills** and we quickly spotted one flying across the road. On the way to camp we saw **African Goshawk**, **African Crowned Eagle** and plenty of **Lizzard buzzards** perched.

#### Day 6 Catapu - Coutadas (Aug 4)

The prime target for the day was the **White-chested Alethe**. Although we heard it a few times and went after it into the forest we only got a brief glimpse of a bird that could have been the Alethe this day (no tick). However, we were soon rewarded by a surprise bird: We heard a **Thick-billed Cuckoo** calling. We called it and we had a few nice flybys by this overwintering(?) Cuckoo. I finally also managed to get a picture of a **Tiny Greenbul**. Continuing deeper into the Coutadas, we saw 2 nicely perched **Bateleurs**. Other birds included a family of **Miombo-Blue-eared Starlings**, a juvenile **Thick-billed Cuckoo**, **Brown-headed Parrots** and my first **White-headed Vulture**. We were searching for the **Black-and-white Flycatcher** without any luck. On the way out of the forest, we saw a family of **Southern Ground Hornbills** with a Juvenile, a flock of **Grey Waxbills** and a family of the local version of **Crested Francolins** (Kirk's). On the way home, I finally got a picture of a **Grey-headed Parrot**.



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#### Day 7 Catapu - Caia (Aug 5)

On the way up to Caia, we again saw many **Lizard Buzzards** + a huge flock of **Silvery-cheeked Hornbills** feeding in a tree. We stopped at a wetland just before Caia and quickly found a **Short-winged Cisticola** close to the road. We walked on the railway line got into a family of **Moustached Grass-Warblers**. We searched without luck for the **Anchieta's Tchagra**. Other birds at the wetland included **African Cuckoo-Hawk**, 2 **African Harrier-Hawks** + **Lemon-breasted Canaries**. We went up to the

Zambezi River without any interesting sightings. Heading back to the camp for lunch, I finally got some better pictures of an **African Goshawk**. During lunch, I spent some time in the forest and saw a **Bearded Scrub-Robin**, 2 **African Crowned Eagles** and several **Crowned Hornbills**. After lunch we decided to go back to the Coutadas. We were quite surprised to find a **Racket-tailed Roller** on a telephone wire! We still could not find the Alethe, but I managed to get a few shots of the **Black-headed Apalis** (a bird that was a lot more elusive than I thought).

#### Day 8 Catapu - Gorongosa (Aug 6)

We headed out early to the Coutadas again. the rest of the group went chasing for the Alethe whilst I tried to get photos of a **Green Malkoha** and **Livingstone Flycatcher's**. On the way back to the car, I was a little ahead of the others and a **White-chested Alethe** crossed the road behind my back. Kevin got a good luck at it when it settled on the forest floor. We went back for breakfast and picked up our stuff. On the way out of camp we finally got a sighting of a male and female **Black-and-white Flycatcher** and also a **Bohms Spinetail**. The drive to Gorongosa was on a smooth tarred road. On the way we saw a pair of **African Hawk Eagles** in a tree + a **Wahlberg Eagle**. Our camp was in the Gorongosa National Park that night.

### Day 9 Gorongosa National Park (Aug 7)

We birded the camp in the morning and I was surprised to see the huge numbers of **Collared Palm-Thrush** in the camp. We also got very good views of 2 female and a male **Black-and-white Flycatchers**. After breakfast we entered into the park itself. The first sighting was a pair of **Red-necked Spurfowls** of the Swynnertoni race. We came across another 2 bands of **Southern Ground Hornbills**, plenty of **Grey Crowned Cranes**, **Senegal lapwings**, **Long-toed Lapwings**, **Black-bellied Bustard**, **Dickinson's Kestrel**, **Ayre's Hawk-Eagle**, **Lesser-crested Eagle**, many **African Fish Eagles**, **Collared Pratincoles** and what might have been a **Malagasy Pond-Heron** (Jury still out). In the river we saw plenty of waterbirds: **Yellow and Saddle-billed Storks**, **Great Egret**, **Pink-backed Pelican** and if you look at the attached picture, a bird that is truly the undertaker: the **Marabou Stork**. On the way out of the park, we also spotted 2 Male lions seeking shade for the sun quite close to the road. We drove out of the camp and headed for the Environtrade camp run by the Van Zyl family just outside the National Park

### Day 10 Gorongosa Mountain (Aug 8)

We were up at 4 this morning in order to get to the mountain in time. It turned out that Sakkie (the son) was working somewhere else and we were quite surprised that the driver was Sakkie's younger sister at 14! The skepticism soon gave way to astonishment. The little lady handled the safari rigged 4X4 Landcruiser like she had never done anything else in the world. She admitted that she had started driving at the age of 11. She also had a very good knowledge of the local birds and where to find them. The walk up to the forested part of the mountain turned out to be a 45 minutes "walk in the park". On the way up we saw **Dark-capped Yellow-Warbler**, **Singing Cisticola** and many **Jameson's Firefinches**. Once in the forest, we pretty quickly found our target bird, the **Green-headed Oriole**. On the way down to the car, we got **Blue-spotted Wood-**



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**Dove** and **Yellow-bellied Waxbill** but no **Anchieta's Tchagra**. Once in the car, the little lady pointed out a good spot and we found the **Broad-tailed Warbler**, a little further down we found some **Black-winged Bishops** in non breeding plumage and finally a pair of **Lesser Seedcrackers** sitting on the road! Kevin enquired about **Arnot's Chat** and the little lady said, sure, no problem. She drove into a quarry and pointed: "there it is". We were quite surprised to see a whole family of chats there.

### Day 11 Environtrade Camp (Aug 9)

We decided to spend the entire day birding the Miombo woodlands around the camp. Nothing really exciting happened this day. I finally got some pictures of **Mosque Swallow** and we also found another **Green-backed Honeybird**.

### Day 12 Gorongosa - Vumba (Aug 10)

In the morning we went back to the foothills of Mount Gorongosa to try to locate the **Anchieta's Tchagra**. Still no luck. We had nice views of **African Cuckoo Hawk** and **Moustached Grass-**

**Warblers.** After a late breakfast with the Van Zyl's we headed out for Zimbabwe and the Vumba. We arrived late afternoon at the White Horse Inn. A quick walk down the road from the hotel revealed a **Black-fronted Bush-Shrike**.

### **Day 13 Vumba (Aug 11)**

We started birding in the forest at Seldomseen in the morning with Buluwezi as our guide (I was there in June and had already ticked off all the specials). Buluwezi took us slowly through the forest and helped the others tick off all the specials: **Roberts's Warbler, Swynnerton's Robin, Chirinda Apalis, Stripe-Cheeked Greenbul, Variable and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds** etc. After breakfast we decided to bird the Tom Hulley Road for some of the Miombo specials. The forest was quite dead. We then continued on towards Vumba Botanical garden and found the **Bronze Sunbird** at a burned lodge outside the gardens. We climbed the Leopard Rock to find the **Mottled Swifts**, but it was probably too early in the season

### **Day 14 Vumba (Aug 12) Cecil Kop**

We headed out to Cecil Kop in the morning. The birding was quite slow, but we managed to get in touch with most of the Miombo specials except the **Miombo Rock-Thrush** and the **Spotted Creeper**. Since I had seen and photographed both of these birds from before, I decided to stay behind at White Horse Inn to take pictures of the resident **Red-throated Twinspots** and **Red-faced Crimsonwings**. I also found a **White-starred Robin** + plenty of sunbirds in the garden of the hotel. When the rest of the gang came back in the afternoon, they had managed to find both the Creeper and the Rock-Thrush + a couple of **Orange-winged Pytilias**.

### **Day 15 Vumba - Bubi River**

We birded the morning in Burma Valley without any sightings of interest. We then headed for Bubi River close to the SA border. At our lunch stop we found a **Greater Honeyguide** + a stop on the way yielded the **Boulder Chat**. Once in the camp, we heard and subsequently photographed both the **African Scops Owl** and the **African Barred Owlet**.

### **Day 16 Bubi River -Johannesburg**

We had an early start with packed breakfast. Before we got to the boarder we spotted a single **Lappet-faced Vulture**, a family of **Southern Ground Hornbills** + a **Tawny Eagle** being mobbed by a couple of **Pied Crows**. The rest of the trip was quit relaxed and I was dropped at O.R. Tamboo at roughly 4PM.

All in all it was a fantastic trip although we missed out on birds like: **Mascarene Martin, Locust Finch, Western, Violet-backed Sunbird, Mottled Swift, Magpie Mannikin, Yellow-bellied Hyliota and White-chested Alethe** (Kevin saw it). On the other hand we ticked many birds we did not expect to see. I assume that is what birding is all about: you have to leave some of them behind for a later trip? The logistics were brilliantly handled by Grahame. He is a very pleasant, good humoured and patient person. I would highly recommend a trip with Reach Africa Birding and Grahame again.

Best regards

Per