

Reach Africa Birding and Getaways



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CHOBE AND CAPRIVI

13 DAY TRIP: 16 to 28 February 2012

The area that we will be visiting is crossed by four major rivers, the **Zambezi** with its **Chobe** tributary in the east, the **Kwando**, in the central Caprivi strip and the **Kavango**, further to the west. These rivers form the boundaries between Namibia, Angola, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe.

The Caprivi Region is in the far north-eastern extremity of Namibia and is the gateway to the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and the Chobe National Park in Botswana. In contrast to the rest of Namibia, the area is lush with riverine forest, marches, dense savannah and mopane woodland.

Botswana, a sparsely populated, wild country is famous for the Okavango, a vast inland delta surrounded by the Kalahari Desert. Whilst the Okavango is truly rich in birdlife, all of its "specials" can be readily seen in the Chobe and Eastern Caprivi. These areas are easily accessible by road and are also far more affordable. The grassy floodplains, mopane woodland and bush alongside the Chobe River support a rich diversity of avifauna.

TRIP DETAILS

We depart from Johannesburg bright and early to allow us do some birding en route. Our first major birding stop is between Francistown and Nata where an isolated rocky outcrop usually produces Boulder Chat.

We spend our first night at the charming Elephant Sands camp, some 50km north of Nata. Besides the attraction of a steady stream of elephants visiting the campside waterhole, there is always the possibility of an evening sighting of Three-banded Courser in the campsite. Early morning birding in the vicinity of the camp on day two should yield some interesting woodland birds, with Icterine and Olive-tree Warblers usually being very common.



We head northwards the next morning after early morning birding around the camp and a hearty breakfast

We travel through excellent game viewing and birding habitat, ranging from mixed woodland to expansive grasslands.

The road from Nata to Kasane is one of only a few major highways in Southern Africa where one is likely to encounter wildlife – especially elephant and giraffe – crossing the road

The main birding attraction for the day is Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, reliably found in agricultural fields near Pandamatenga.

This road is also excellent for birds of prey, including Steppe and Lesser Spotted Eagle. A roadside pan yielded Green Sandpiper on our visit in February 2009

The **Chobe National Park** and surrounds is undoubtedly one of the prime birding destinations in southern Africa. The total bird list for the area is in excess of 450 species. Encompassing some 11 000sq km, Chobe National Park also supports Botswana's densest and most varied game populations, including four of the Big 5 and a number of rare antelope species.



Habitats consist of mixed broad-leaved woodland, riverine woodland, the Chobe River floodplain and seasonal pans. These habitats are home to a tremendous diversity of birds, including all the Okavango specials.

Game viewing and birding is often best from the river and an afternoon boat cruise is usually very rewarding. Early morning game drives into the Park often yield spectacular game and bird sightings

We spend two nights at Senyati Safari Camp.

We cross the border into Namibia at Ngoma and heading

for the **Kwando River** which forms the border between east and west Caprivi, 100km west of Katima Mulilo in Namibia.

The wide range of habitats along the Kwando allows a variety of birding opportunities, with over 400 species recorded.

Along the Kwando River there are extensive floodplains, reed and papyrus beds and riverine forest. Away from the river the mixed woodland includes teak, combretum, burkea, terminalia, and acacia forests and thickets, and open grasslands.

Our home for one night is Camp Kwando, a comfortable lodge situated on the river bank and an absolute haven for birders

From here we explore Mudumu National Park, a vast 1 010km² expanse of dense savannah and mopane woodlands, with the Kwando River as its western border.

Over 430 species of birds have been recorded in the Mudumu National Park which is nearly 70% of Namibia's total.

Game viewing can be exceptional, with huge herds of elephant present, particularly during the dry season (June-November).

We head westwards to Divundu, situated at the western edge of the Caprivi Strip, on the banks of the **Kavango River**

The **Kavango River** rises in the highlands of Angola and flows through Namibia before flooding onto the soft sands of the Kalahari, creating the inland Okavango delta. Our focus is on the Okavango Panhandle, the

main watercourse supplying the Okavango Delta. The Panhandle is a stretch of approximately 70km of the Okavango River from where the river leaves Namibia and enters Botswana until it fans out.

Popa Falls, Bwabwata National Park and the Mahango Game Reserve are without doubt the prime sites for birding in the western Caprivi, over 420 species having been recorded there, including all the “Okavango specials”.

Mammals found in Bwabwata and Mahango include Elephant, Buffalo, Leopard, Wild Dog, Roan and Sable Antelope, Lechwe, Reedbuck and the very rare Sitatunga.

We spend two nights at Nunda River Lodge on the banks of the Kavango River.

We retrace our steps across the Caprivi Strip to Katima Mulilo

Birding in the area around **Katima Mulilo** in the eastern Caprivi is an all-year round pleasure with excellent opportunities to see over 430 species of birds which inhabit the floodplains and surrounding areas.

Other habitats in the area include riverine woodland, mixed woodland, dense acacia thickets, mopane woodland and scattered baobabs

There are few places on earth where sunsets are more spectacular.

We spend two nights at Caprivi River Lodge on the outskirts of Katima Mulilo and two nights at Kalizo Lodge, set in a beautiful African environment on the banks of the Zambezi River, some 40km east of Katima Mulilo.

Our next overnight destination for one night is Touch of Africa Safari Lodge, near Pandamatenga, some 100km south of Kasane.

This lodge is well positioned for our visit the next morning to **Kazuma Pans**, a relatively poorly known but potentially very rewarding birding area.

The Kazuma Pans area consists of massive pans filled with newly sprouted bright green grasses with patches of water and the occasional palm tree. One can see for a kilometre or two across the pans. The pan systems provide ideal habitat to a large variety of water birds, including storks, cranes, cormorants, ducks and kingfishers

The prospect of finding unusual waders and rallids is good

We begin our journey homewards. Our last overnight stop is at **Nata**, some 180km north of Francistown, on the eastern side of the Makgadigadi Pans. The habitats range from extensive grasslands and salt pans in the Nata Sanctuary, to mixed woodland around Nata Lodge.

We overnight at the charming Nata Lodge situated a stone's throw away from the Makgadigadi Pans.

BIRDING ATTRACTIONS

Elephant Sands and Touch of Africa

Double-banded Courser, Three-banded Courser, Icterine Warbler, Olive-tree Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Tinkling Cisticola, Meyer's Parrot, Cape Penduline-Tit

Steppe Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, Grey Crowned Crane, Wattled Crane, Montagu's Harrier, Desert Cisticola

Northern Chobe National Park and Kasane

Western Banded Snake-Eagle, Osprey, Collared Pratincole, African Finfoot, African Pygmy-goose, Coppery-tailed Coucal, White-browed Coucal, Hartlaub's Babbler, Three-banded Courser, Pennant-winged Nightjar, Broad-tailed Paradise-Whydah, Orange-winged Pytilia, Red-faced Cisticola, Brown Firefinch, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, Grey-rumped Swallow, Swamp Boubou, Copper Sunbird, Purple-banded Sunbird, Slaty Egret, Rufous-bellied Heron, White-backed Night Heron, Allen's Gallinule, Lesser Moorhen, Chirping Cisticola, Luapula Cisticola, Greater Swamp-Warbler, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Yellow White-eye



Kwando River area

Western Banded Snake-Eagle, Wattled Crane, Pennant-winged Nightjar, Rufous-bellied Heron, African Crake, Greater Swamp-Warbler, Racket-tailed Roller, Hartlaub's Babbler, Bradfield's Hornbill, Swamp Boubou, Arnot's Chat, Chirping Cisticola, Luapula Cisticola, Tinkling Cisticola, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Brown Firefinch, Copper Sunbird, Purple-banded Sunbird

Popa Falls, Mahango Game Reserve & Bwabwata National Park

Western Banded Snake-Eagle, African Hobby, Dickinson's Kestrel, African Barred Owlet, African Wood-Owl, Senegal, White-browed and Coppery-tailed Coucal, Swamp Boubou, Black-faced and Hartlaub's Babbler, Rufous-bellied Tit, Sharp-tailed Starling, Yellow White-eye, Brown Firefinch, Chirping and Luapula Cisticola, Wattled Crane, Rufous-bellied Heron, Long-toed Lapwing, African Pygmy-goose, Lesser Jacana, White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike, Bradfield's Hornbill

Katima Mulilo and Kalizo

African Hobby, Shelley's Sunbird, African Skimmer, Black Coucal, Coppery-tailed Coucal, White-browed Coucal, African Pygmy-goose, Collared Pratincole, Long-toed Lapwing, White-crowned Lapwing, Lesser Jacana, Dwarf Bittern, Allen's Gallinule, Schalow's Turaco, Grey-headed Parrot, African Wood-Owl, African Barred Owlet, Pennant-winged Nightjar, Rufous-bellied Heron, Bradfield's Hornbill, Arnot's Chat, Broad-tailed Paradise-Whydah

Nata

Boulder Chat (en route), Double-banded Courser, Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, Burchell's Sandgrouse, Pink-billed Lark, Montagu's Harrier, Pallid Harrier, and Red-necked Falcon.

The Makgadigadi Pans usually contain water at this time of the year and host numerous waders and waterbirds