

Trip report – Zimbabwe Birding



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On Sunday 6 February 2011 six of us flew out of OR Tambo airport to join Grahame Snow in Harare for a ten-day birding trip in Zimbabwe. On arrival we made our way to Crake Cottage where we were to spend the next two nights.

In Harare we birded the Monavale, Marlborough and Haka Nature Reserve vleis as well as the Botanical Gardens and Mukuvisi woodland. At the

vleis we were lucky enough to record African Crake, Corncrake, Striped Crake and Streaky-breasted Flufftail (the latter at Haka where we flushed two different birds). Other good birds included Black Coucal, Rosy-throated Longclaw, Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Pale-crowned Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Orange-breasted Waxbill and Grey-rumped Swallow. In the woodland areas some of the more special birds seen included Miombo Rock Thrush, Whyte's Barbet, Spotted Creeper, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Yellow White-eye, Black Cuckooshrike, Gabar Goshawk, Variable Sunbird, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and African Cuckoo. It was interesting to note that Abdims Storks were everywhere (even at the airport when we landed) and this was a lifer for one of our group. A special trip was made to a spot about 20 kilometres out of Harare on the Kariba road where we had superb views of the Copper Sunbird. What a spectacular bird this is when in the direct sunlight. Also recorded Brimstone Canary here.

From Harare we moved on to Marondera where we stayed with Jen Mitchell in her magnificent thatched farmhouse. The farm adjoins Gosho Park, which the Mitchell family had donated to the nation some years ago. Here we birded Gosho extensively and were pleased to record Miombo Rock Thrush, Cabanis's Bunting, Black-eared Seedeater, Wood Pipit, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Southern Hyliota, Green-backed Honeybird, Green-capped Eremomela, Red-faced Crombec, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Miombo Tit, Lazy Cisticola, Striped Pipit, Shelley's Francolin, Freckled Nightjar, Whytes Barbet and Spotted Creeper. Gosho Park never fails to provide a good number of Miombo woodland birds. While in this area we also visited a vlei area on Fagan's farm east of Gosho where we had a superb sighting of Red-chested Flufftail and Broad-tailed Warbler.



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From Goshu we moved on to Aberfoyle, one of my favourite birding venues and true to form it was to give me a superb lifer and a bird that I had been looking for a long, long time. Morgan Saineti the local bird guide, joined us and while birding the general area we recorded Black Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Hobby, Mountain Wagtail, Anchieta's Tchagra, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike, Green-backed (Little Spotted) Woodpecker, Palm-nut Vulture, Mottled and Scarce Swift, Singing and Short-winged Cisticola, White-eared Barbet, Square-tailed Drongo, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Red-throated Twinspot, Grey and Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Magpie Mannikin, Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, Eastern Saw-wing and Black-winged Bishop.

One afternoon we hiked up the Gleneagles path. Near the top Scarce Swifts were flying and two Lanner Falcons cruised along the cliff face. Then another raptor caught our attention; it had pointed wings and was a fast flyer but was too far away to get a positive ID. We returned down the path and had just cleared the trees when Grahame shouted. An Eleonora's Falcon flew right over us and we had crippling views of it – the one bird that I was really hoping to see.

From Aberfoyle we moved on to the Vumba where we stayed at the White Horse Inn but birded with Bulawezi of Seldomseen. At Seldomseen we recorded Swynnerton's Robin, Lemon Dove, Roberts's Warbler, Chirinda Apalis, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Livingstone's Turaco, Eastern Saw-wing, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike, Miombo double-collared Sunbird and Yellow-bellied Waxbill. A very special sighting however was that of a Buff-spotted Flufftail sitting on five eggs. This was apparently her second clutch of the season. A day later two of the eggs had hatched revealing two tiny chicks. This was our third Flufftail sighting of the trip. Other good birds on the way to Leopard Rock included Bronzy Sunbird, Augur Buzzard and Mottled Swift.

An excursion down the Burma Road gave us Twinspot (Zambezi) Indigobird and Orange-winged Pytilia, which was seen by some. A calling Thrush Nightingale in a dense bush was only seen by one member of our group who crawled into the bush and was rewarded for his determination.

A trip to Christmas Pass rewarded the group with Boulder Chat, Cinnamon-breasted Tit, Cabanis's Bunting, Black-eared Seedeater, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Grey Penduline-Tit, Miombo Rock Thrush, Tree Pipit and Miombo Tit.



From the Vumba we then made our way south to Three Ways Safaris on the Bubi River and then back home after a relatively easy crossing at the border.

Our thanks are due to Grahame Snow of Reach Africa Safaris for an excellent birding trip. We notched up 312 birds in total.

John Bradshaw