

Malawi

2018 Tour Details



African Skimmer

18-31 October 2018

BIRDING 'THE WARM HEART OF AFRICA'

- excellent miombo birding at Dzalanyama
- montane forest specials
- diverse birding on the Nyika Plateau
- superb lowland birding at Liwonde National Park
- good mammal-viewing opportunities



© Callan Cohen

Scarlet-tufted Malachite Sunbird

TOUR LEADER: MICHAEL MILLS



Michael's incredible focus, dedication and ability to locate and show Africa's toughest birds is probably unequalled on the continent. He has led dozens of tours across Africa and his experience in locating birds on just the softest of calls or briefest of views impresses those who travelled with him.

DATES

14-day Tour 18-31 Oct 2018

PROVISIONAL PRICES

Sharing \$5950

Single room \$770

Includes tips, meals and lodgings!

BOOK ONLINE

Visit www.birdingafrica.com
Deposit (\$110) by credit card
Email Marje at info@birdingafrica.com



Pel's Fishing Owl

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TOUR SUMMARY

Our 14-day tour to the 'warm heart of Africa' takes in the best birding on offer in Malawi, one of the most under-birded countries in Africa. Expect to see both a high diversity of birds and good numbers of localised specialities. Mammals watching opportunities are good too, and the scenery is spectacular.

We visit Dzalanyama for miombo birds, Nyika Plateau for montane forest and grassland species, Lake Malawi, Liwonde National Park for lowland savannas, and Zomba Plateau and Mount Mulanje for montane forest species.

TOUR FOCUS

Malawi offers a good list of specials for world listers and a wide array of species and other wildlife for those with a more general interest.

This trip has a strong focus on watching birds, but there are opportunities too for some mammal watching and bird (and other) photography.

Let us know if you have target species or want to know more about the species we might encounter. A species list will be handed out to you as part of

your tour booklet at the start of the tour and is available beforehand upon request.

The tour is timed to coincide with the breeding season of birds. We expect to encounter a little rain, probably as afternoon thunderstorms. At lower altitudes days will be hot, but in the mountains it will be cooler, and potentially quite misty.

We will make use of one or two four-wheel-drive vehicles, depending on group size. More details about what to expect, how to prepare and what to pack are provided in our Tour Information Pack.

ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS

Are generally good by African standards, and vary from exclusive lodges to boutique hotels and old rest houses. Rooms mostly have private facilities and although the supply can be intermittent, there is hot water most of the time. At two sites we will be staying in large old rest houses, and will need to share ablution facilities.

Meals are Western-style. Please advise if you are vegetarian and what foods you enjoy, so that we can cater for you.

Water is not safe to drink so we supply free bottled water in the vehicle that you can take to your rooms for drinking and brushing teeth.

WALKING

This tour requires at least a moderate degree of fitness. Most walks will be done at a gentle pace, although a couple of hikes may be required to reach remoter forest patches with the most localised specials.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum 9 participants.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Please plan to fly in to Lilongwe by 13h00 on the first day of the tour (18 Oct) and out from Lilongwe after 13h00 on the last day of the tour (31 Oct).



Pennant-winged Nightjar

© Tertius Gous

INTRODUCTION

Malawi, dubbed the warm heart of Africa, is a compact central African country with a tropical climate and friendly people. From a birder's perspective it offers a wide range of species, including a good number of specials, in a small area. Miombo woodlands, lowland savanna and montane grasslands and forests are found in close proximity. It is one of Africa's overlooked secrets, and deserves to see far more birders visit than it presently does.

Our fourteen day itinerary takes in the best that the country has to offer, and aims to find as many regional specialties as possible.

The first real birding of the trip will be at Dzalanyama, west of Lilongwe with its international airport. It is one of the top miombo birding sites worldwide, and we stand to see a good range of miombo specialists, plus local specialties such as the localised Stierling's Woodpecker. Other sought-after species may include Böhm's Flycatcher, Souza's Shrike, Boulder Chat, Whyte's Barbet and Pale-billed Hornbill, and with some luck, Olive-headed Weaver and Shelley's Sunbird.

From here we move north to the Nyika plateau, breaking the journey overnight along the way and pausing on the edge of Vwaza Marsh National Park to look for the very localised miombo birds, White-winged Babbling Starling and Chestnut-mantled Sparrow-Weaver.

The spectacular Nyika plateau is the country's premier birding destination. The rich montane grasslands are full of special birds, and we'll take our time to pick out species such as Black-lored Cisticola, Churring Cisticola, Blue Swallow, Wattled Crane, Red-winged Francolin and the very localised Montane Marsh Widowbird. However, it is the montane forests that will be the main focus of our visit, as they offer us the chance of seeing several birds that can otherwise be seen only in the remote mountains of Tanzania, including Sharpe's Greenbul, Yellow-browed Seedeater and Whyte's Double-collared Sunbird. Other special montane forest birds include Moustached Green Tinkerbird, Bar-tailed Trogon, Olive-flanked Robin-Chat, Sharpe's Akalat, Malawi Batis, Fülleborn's Boubou and Chapin's Apalis.

Our journey back south sees us stop off on the shores of Lake Malawi for a night, and nearby we hope to find East Coast Akalat, before arriving at Liwonde National Park, the country's premier big game reserve located on the banks of the Shire River. Around our lodge we hope to find Southern Brown-throated Weaver, Böhm's Bee-eater and Lilian's Lovebird, and wide forays could turn up Pel's Fishing Owl, Livingstone's Flycatcher, White-backed Night Heron and Brown-breasted Barbet.

The final days of our visit will focus on the tall mountains of southern Malawi, including the Zomba Plateau and Mount Mulanje, the country's highest. Top birds here include White-winged Apalis, the endemic Yellow-throated Apalis, Thyolo Alethe and Bertram's Weaver.



Miombo Scrub Robin

© Tertius Gous

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Day 1: Arrive Lilongwe; to Dzalanyama

Welcome to Malawi! Once you have dealt with arrival formalities and collected your luggage, proceed to the arrivals hall, watching out for a board showing your name or 'Birding Africa'. From the airport we will head to Dzalanyama, about a 90 minute's drive west of Lilongwe.

Days 2-3: Dzalanyama Forest Reserve

Dzalanyama is one of the top miombo birding sites worldwide, and provides a great introduction to Central African birding. We have two full days to sample its delights, which include a wide range of miombo specialists and some highly localised specials.

Among the more widespread species we may find Green-backed Honeybird, Black-eared Seedeater, Reichard's Seedeater, Anchieta's Sunbird, Pale-billed Hornbill, Retz's Helmetshrike, Rufous-bellied Tit, Southern Hyliota, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Miombo Scrub Robin, Miombo Tit, Red-capped Crombec, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Green-capped Eremomela, African Spotted Creeper, Miombo Blue-eared Starling, Miombo Scrub Robin, Miombo Rock Thrush, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird (Eastern Miombo Sunbird) and Orange-winged Pytilia. Importantly, Dzalanyama is the most accessible site for Stierling's Woodpecker, and other more localised species include Whyte's Barbet, Souza's Shrike, Boulder Chat, Böhm's Flycatcher, and two very rare species namely Olive-headed Weaver and Shelley's Sunbird.

Forested and swampy areas along river courses offer a different variety of species, which may include Schalow's Turaco, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Little Spotted Woodpecker, Eastern Saw-wing and, if very lucky, Lesser Seedcracker.

Days 4: Dzalanyama to Viphya

Today is mostly a travel day, as we make our way back through Lilongwe and then a long way north. We break the overnight journey on the Viphya plateau where we could find our first montane species, potentially including Ruwenzori Nightjar.



Souza's Shrike

© Tertius Gous

Day 5: Viphya to Nyika

After a short stint of birding around our accommodation we continue our journey onto the Nyika Plateau. En route we'll stop to search for two very localised miombo species at Vwaza Marsh, namely White-winged Babbling Starling and Chestnut-mantled Sparrow-Weaver. Other species here could include Pale-billed Hornbill and Miombo Pied Barbet.

Days 6-7: Nyika National Park

One of Africa's top birding destinations, the fabulous and relative untouched Nyika Plateau is home for the next two days.

The vast majority of the area is covered in montane grasslands and scrublands. Here more widespread species include Blue Swallow, Wattled Crane, Northern Red-winged Francolin, Denham's Bustard and Malachite Sunbird. Localised grassland species include Churring Cisticola, Black-lored Cisticola, Montane Marsh Widowbird and Scarlet-tufted Malachite Sunbird.

Small patches of montane forest occur in some of the valleys, and at thickets around the forest edge we may find Yellow-browed Seedeater, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Baglafaecht Weaver, Whyte's Double-collared Sunbird, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Hildebrandt's Francolin, Mountain Yellow Warbler and Dusky Turtle Dove.

The forests present an opportunity to see several localised species otherwise confined to remote mountains in southern Tanzania, but also hold a range of more widespread birds. Targets will include Sharpe's Akalat, White-chested Alethe, Olive-flanked Robin-Chat, Fülleborn's Boubou, Chapin's Apalis, Brown-headed Apalis, Bar-tailed Trogon, Moustached Green Tinkerbird, Southern Mountain Greenbul and Sharpe's Greenbul.



Böhm's Bee-eater

© Tertius Gous

Day 8 : Nyika to Lake Malawi

With a long drive ahead of us we'll make an early start on our journey back south, with the aim of visiting Vwaza Marsh again to search for White-winged Babbling Starling and Chestnut-mantled Sparrow-Weaver. The rest of the day will be spent in transit to our accommodation on the shores of Lake Malawi. Around the lodge we expect to find Yellow Weaver (African Golden Weaver) and perhaps Grey-olive Greenbul.



Racket-tailed Roller

Day 9: Lake Malawi to Liwonde

Before breakfast we'll visit some forest near our overnight accommodation to search for East Coast Akalat, and other lowland forest birds such as Eastern Nicator. The rest of the day will be spent in transit to Liwonde, where our camp is set on the banks of the Shire River.

Day 10: Liwonde National Park

Although most of Liwonde is blanketed in extensive Mopane woodlands, the riverine habitats of the Shire River will be the main focus of our visit, with two secretive gallery forest birds on our radar, namely White-backed Night Heron and Pel's Fishing Owl. Along the river we also expect to find

Long-toed Lapwing, Southern Brown-throated Weaver, Livingstone's Flycatcher, the localised Lilian's Lovebird, Meves's Starling, Collared Palm Thrush, Brown-headed Parrot, Böhm's Bee-eater, African Skimmer and Brown-breasted Barbet. Some time will also be spent in the extensive woodlands where Racket-tailed Roller, Arnott's Chat, Speckle-throated Woodpecker and Dickinson's Kestrel are all possible.

Day 11: Liwonde to Zomba Plateau

After some final birding around Liwonde we'll make the short journey to Zomba Plateau, where we will have an afternoon and morning to bird.

Day 12: Zomba to Mount Malanje

One of several isolated mountains in southern Malawi, Zomba offers easy access to some key forest birds, with Malawi's only endemic, Yellow-throated Apalis, seen most easily here. Other targets include Olive-headed Greenbul, the stunning White-

winged Apalis, White-eared Barbet, Malawi Batis, Black-headed Apalis and Bertram's Weaver. There is also an outside chance for Thyolo Alethe.

In the afternoon we'll move on Mount Mulanje, the highest mountain in Malawi.

Day 13: Mount Mulanje

We have a full day to explore the montane forests of Mount Mulanje, with the localised race of Olive-flanked Robin-Chat (split by BirdLife) and Thyolo Alethe being the birds on top of our hit list. Other highlights may include Silver-cheeked Hornbill, Black-fronted Bushshrike, Olive Bushshrike, Placid Greenbul, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Evergreen Forest Warbler and Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler.

Day 14: Mulanje to Lilongwe

Today we return to Lilongwe where the tour ends on arrival.



East Coast Akalat



White-backed Night Heron

© Tertius Gous

INCLUDED

- Birding Africa tour leaders and local guides
- entry fees and activities as per itinerary
- accommodation and all meals
- airport transfers
- bottled water in the vehicle
- one soft drink per meal
- tips

BOOKLET AND CHECKLIST

Birding Africa provides:

1. this Tour Details leaflet with detailed itinerary.
2. a Tour Information Pack, emailed to you.
3. the Tour Booklet with checklists, provided in hard copy at the start of the tour.

QUESTIONS?

Email Michael at michael@birdingafrica.com and copy callan@birdingafrica.com.

HOW TO BOOK

1. Complete our easy online booking form.
2. Secure your booking deposit by credit card on our 3D secure online payment site (ZAR2000 or about \$110.)
3. Settle the balance by bank transfer 150 days before the tour. We will email you a reminder and the banking details.



Cabanis's Bunting

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