Full Detailed Itinerary - Angola: Africa's Wonderful Wild West

Day 1: Luanda-Kwanza

After we pick you up in the capital city, we drive 1.5 hours south to the Kwanza area, right on the boundary of Kissama NP. This location supports some very interesting passerines including Orange Weaver, the rusty-necked variety of Village Weaver, the noisy Bubbling Cisticola, Mouse-brown Sunbird, Angolan Swallow, Long-legged Pipit, the stunning Blue-breasted Kingfisher, and the hefty Palm-nut Vulture. There are many shorebirds and terns on the beaches of the Kwanza River and we will look for Caspian, Royal and Sandwich Terns, and loads of shorebirds including Curlew Sandpiper, Black-bellied Plover and White-fronted Plover. We might also locate the odd ‘all-dark’ swifts which remain a bit of a taxonomic enigma. Overnight in Kwanza.

Day 2: Kwanza to Uige

After some early morning birding around Kwanza we will make the long drive to Uige, climbing the northern scarp to where the tongues of Guinea-Congo lowlands forest project to their southernmost limits. En-route we may encounter Blue-throated Roller, Great Blue Turaco, Black Bee-eater, Shining-blue Kingfisher, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, the local form of Black-backed Barbet, Moustached Grass-Warbler, Whistling Cisticola, Pale Wren-Warbler, Salvadori’s variety of Yellow-bellied Eremomela or Brown Twinspot. However, our main quarry here will be the rare endemic Braun’s Bushshrike. If we arrive with enough time, we will make an attempt this afternoon. We have a two-night stay in Uige.

Day 3: Uige

The scarp here holds a wonderful mosaic of habitats, resulting in a dizzying array of possible species. The combo of Congo-Guinea forests and forest edge make for a great birding experience. If Braun’s Bushshrike was not seen the previous day, we will make this morning all about locating one, as we listen carefully for their telltale croaking vocalizations. While we search, we are bound to bump into a slew of awesome typical central African forest birds such as Afep and Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, Gabon Coucal, Cassin’s Hawk-Eagle, Great Blue Turaco, Black-casqued Wattled Hornbills, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Black Bee-eater, Blue-throated Roller, Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo, Bristle-nosed Barbet, several species of tinkerbirds, Bocage’s Bushshrike, Simple Greenbul, Banded Prinia, Masked Apalis, the strange Tit-hylia, the hefty Red-headed Bluebill, Pink-footed Puffback, and several species of weavers, flycatchers and sunbirds. The potential for a rarity here is good, as the area is diverse and under-birded.

Day 4: Uige to Calandula

We’ll have a final morning at the scarp forests before traversing the miombo en route to Calandula. We’ll check bridges for Red-throated Cliff Swallows. Arriving in Calandula we should have time to bird the gallery forest and miombo this afternoon. We have a two-night stay at Calandula. En-route we will bird the small patches of gallery forest and search for Gray-winged Robin-Chat, Black-backed Barbet and other forest birds. This stretch has also delivered Congo Moor Chat in the past and we will keep a sharp eye out for these.

Day 5: Calandula

This region holds arguably the most sought-after bird in Angola: the stunning White-headed Robin-chat, a large and bold songster, but a skulker. We'll put in the effort to lay eyes on this stunning beauty. Occasionally the scarce Brazza's Martin can be found in this area too, and we shall keep our eyes peeled, although we'd need exceptional luck to find it. Other great gallery forest birds include Schalow's Turaco, Gray-winged Robin-Chat, African Broadbill, Brown-headed Apalis, Ross's Turaco, Blue-headed Coucal, Narina Trogon, White-chinned Prinia, Brown Illadopsis and more. Adjacent the gallery forest is mature Brachystegia (Miombo) woodland, with many excellent species that are restricted to this habitat within Angola. Specifically, we search for Black-backed and Anchieta's Barbets and Anchieta's Sunbird. Other Miombo-specialist birds we can find here include Pale-billed Hornbill, Sharp-tailed Starling, Miombo Wren-Warbler, Miombo Scrub-Robin, Green-capped Eremomela, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Rufous-bellied Tit, and White-winged Black Tit.

Day 6: Calandula to Ndalatando

Today is another travel day, but not without rewards, as we visit the amazing Calandula Falls. These span over 1300 feet (400 m) and drop over 300 feet (100 m), making them the second largest (by volume) falls in Africa after Victoria Falls. After the falls we will reach the Ndalatando area and pay a visit to the remarkable Tombingo Forest. Here we will look for more birds shared with the Guinea-Congolian forests of central Africa including the localized Red-fronted Parrot in fruiting trees or flying overhead. Other cool birds include Great Blue Turaco, Piping, Congo Pied and Black-casqued Wattled Hornbills, Blue Malkoha, Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Eastern Yellow-billed Barbet, Brown-eared and Golden-crowned Woodpeckers, Bocage's Bushshrike, Red-tailed Bristlebill, Honeyguide Greenbul, Yellow Longbill, African Shrike-flycatcher, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Red-necked Buzzard, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Green Crombec, Yellow-throated Nicator, Splendid and Chestnut-winged Starling, Little, Plain, Yellow-necked, Pale-throated and Slender-billed Greenbul, Black Bee-eater, Brown Twinspot, Red-backed Mousebird and many many more. We spend only one night in the bustling city of Ndalatando.

Day 7: Ndalatando to Muxima

We have another morning in the scarp forest at Ndalatando before we head to Muxima and the drier thornscrub of the coast for a two-night stay. Our journey today takes us through some of the most stunning Baobab-Euphorbia dry deciduous forests in Africa!

Day 8: Muxima

First thing in the morning, we will head into habitat amongst the odd cactus-like Candelabra trees where we will target three special birds, the dapper White-fronted Wattle-eye and the skulking Gray-striped Spurfowl which will hopefully not play too hard-to-get. The toughest will be the Gabala (Angola) Helmet-shrike. Although this is not the only place to catch up with this great species, we need to try every opportunity to meet success. Other good local species may include Montiero's Bushshrike, Angola Swallow, Narina Trogon, Pale-olive Greenbul or the unusual black-rumped Horus Swifts that seem oddly localized around Luanda.

Day 9: Muxima to Kumbira Forest

We have another opportunity for any of the local specialties we may have missed before we head for Kumbira, where we have our next stopping point.

Day 10-11: Kumbira or forest near Gabela and Namba

This site holds the core of the range for the majority of Angola's most unique birds, making it necessary to invest a considerable amount of time here. Our main targets will include: the dowdy but very local Gabela Akalat; strange Pulitzer's Longbill; common Hartert's Camaroptera; and Monteiro's and Gabela Bushshrikes. Early in the morning we should hear the calls of Red-crested Turaco, Crowned Hornbill and Grey-striped Spurfowl (a very early morning wake-up will be necessary for this species which calls until first light), Yellow-necked Greenbul, Forest Scrub-Robin and African Broadbill. Other very interesting and globally local birds of Kumbira include Pale-olive Greenbul, Angola Batis, and isolated and potential splits of Dusky Tit, Brown-chested Alethe, and Naked-faced Barbet. We'll also keep our eyes peeled for Elliot's and Buff-spotted Woodpeckers, Petit's Cuckooshrike, Black-throated and Buff-throated Apalises, Gorgeous (Perrin's) Bushshrike, Mackinnon's Shrike, Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye, Brown-capped Weaver, Red-headed Malimbe, Green-backed Twinspot, Red-faced Crimsonwing, GreyWaxbill, and Black-faced Canary. We will also visit the Namba area which has a slew of different birds that we can target, including the Bocage's trio: akalat, sunbird and weaver, Carmelite Sunbird, Black-backed and Anchieta's Barbets, Black-collared Bulbul, Margaret's Batis, Finsch's Francolin and the rare and delightful Sweirstra's Spurfowl,Bar-tailed T rogon, Angola Slaty-Flycatcher, Ludwig's Double-collared and Oustalet's (Angola) Sunbirds, Dusky Twinspot, scarce Laura's Woodland Warbler and Black-necked Eremomela. Both Red-necked Buzzards and Crowned Eagles also occur here. On our return from Namba we will visit some prime Miombo where we have the opportunity for Black-backed Barbet, Moustached Grass-Warbler, Whistling Cisticola, Miombo Wren-Warbler, Yellow-bellied (Salvadori's) and Black-necked Eremomelas, African Spotted Creeper, an odd race of Arrow-marked Babbler, Anchieta's Sunbird and other Miombo specials. The area is good for Huambo and Short-winged Cisticolas as well as Moustached Grass Warbler, Broad-tailed Warbler, and Marsh (Anchieta's) Tchagra.

Day 12: Kumbira to Alto Hama

After our wonderful 3-night stay we have to get on the move again, and after another morning in the Kumbira area we head south to Alto Hama. There will be opportunistic stops en-route when we see new birds. The road has several bridges along the way where Red-rumped Swallow, Brazza's Martin and other good birds can be found.

Day 13-14: Alto Hama

Alto Hama is a small town, where a basic but comfortable hotel will be our base for accessing one of Angola's most famous birding sites: Morro de Moco. Here we will visit lower-elevation wetlands, scrubby areas, and miombo woodland for species like Yellow-bellied (Salvadori's) and Black-necked Eremomelas, Bocage's Weaver, Bocage's Sunbird, and Black-and-rufous Swallow. We may also venture to higher-elevation grasslands and montane forest patches, though reaching these requires some strenuous hiking. Targets in these higher habitats are similar to those at Namba, and include Swiestra's Spurfowl and Margaret's (Angola) Batis.

Day 15: Alto Hama to Lubango

We have another long day in the car, as it's a several-hour drive to the southern scarp at Lubango. However, there will be birding en-route and as we get to Lubango can expect some different and interesting birds.

Day 16: Tundavala Escarpment

Some of Africa's finest scenery is on offer with massive cliffs that drop nearly one kilometer to the arid plains below. The high-elevation grassland habitat is interspersed with forest patches and outcrops. One of the main reasons for visiting this site is the snazzy Angola Cave-Chat, a smart bird in a stunning landscape. Also Swierstra's and Finsch's Francolins remain here (but very rare) if we have missed them earlier in the trip. Other specialties include Fülleborn's Longclaw, Ludwig's Double-collared Sunbird, Angola Slaty-Flycatcher, Freckled Nightjar, Bradfield's and Alpine Swifts, Hartlaub's Babbler, Miombo Rock-Thrush, Salvadori's Eremomela, African Firefinch and the stunning Angola Waxbill.

Day 17: Namibe

From Lubango it's about a two-hour drive down into the barren flats of the Namib Desert, where we will go birding on the fringes of the Namibe NP. Our first stop however will be the Leba Escarpment, which is not only gorgeous, but also holds the very localized Cinderella Waxbill and Rockrunner. Further towards the coast we hit the true Namib and can expect many of the specialty birds more associated with Namibia, including Ludwig's Bustard, Bare-cheeked Babbler, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Monteiro's and Damara Red-billed Hornbills, Stark's, Benguela Long-billed, and Sabota Larks, Karoo and Tractrac Chats, Kalahari Scrub-Robin, Chat Flycatcher, Ground Batis (White-tailed Shrike), Carp's Tit, Pale-winged and Meves's Starlings (sometimes split as Kunene Long-tailed Starling), Dusky Sunbird, and Lark-like Bunting. After a long day in the field we return to Lubango to overnight.

Day 18: Departure

Today after breakfast we head to Lubango airport where the tour ends. We'll arrive in time to catch flights out to Windhoek, Namibia or Luanda, Angola.

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