Full Detailed Itinerary - Eastern Zambia: Wet-Season Wonderland

Day 1: Lusaka to Nchelenge (Via Mansa)

Having gathered in the bustling capital of Lusaka, one of the continent's fastest developing cities situated on a limestone plateau at 1,280 meters above sea level, we depart northward on our morning connecting flight to the town of Mansa. After our brief 1.5 hour flight, we will have our first introduction to the country's breathtaking scenery as we travel by road to the town of Nchelenge, dedicating time en-route to search for "Zambian" Papyrus Yellow-Warbler and Katanga Masked-Weaver. We will overnight in Nchelenge.

Day 2: Nchelenge to Kasama

Enjoying your first official Zambian dawn in the bush, the glistening reflections of Lake Mweru bring with it a tangible sense of excitement at what in store for our tour. This 131km2 freshwater lake forms the border between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia and is one of the continent's great Rift Valley Lakes. Here we explore the network of papyrus in the hope of connecting with White-winged Swamp Warbler, Slender-billed Weaver, "Zambian" Papyrus Yellow-Warbler , Swamp Flycatcher and Marsh Tchagra. We will have a brief stop at Ntumbachusi Falls to search for Rock Pratincole, which perch atop the boulder strewn rapids in the mist of the falls themselves. A single night will be spent in Kasama.

Day 3:Nchelenge to Kasama to Mbala

A productive morning lies in wait at Uningi Pans, one of eastern Zambia's most productive important bird and biodiversity areas. Home to an abundance of waterbirds, the site consists of two large pans separated by a strip of land, creating the ideal habitat for the likes of White-backed Duck, African and Lesser Jacana, and African Pygmy Goose to go about their daily antics, whilst the woodland-dominated fringes play host to Oustalet's Sunbird, Black-backed Barbet and Olive Woodpecker. We will enjoy one final stop for the day at Kalambo Falls to enjoy one of our first tasters of Zambia's famed miombo birding, as well as witness good numbers of Mottled Swift screaming in the skies above our heads. The night will be spent in Mbala.

Day 4:Nchelenge to Kasama to Mbala to Kapishya (via Saise)

Departing Mbala at sunrise, we will head directly to Saise in the hopes of connecting with Tanzania Masked Weaver, Bare-faced Go-away-bird and Spot-flanked Barbet. We will then continue en route to the famed Kapishya Hot Springs; a series of naturally occurring hot springs which comprise the approximate total of 80 across the country. Here, the term "relaxed birding" is given context, and we'll enjoy some well needed rest after a long day spent in transit. Relaxation does come with a view, and the likes of Green-headed Sunbird, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Ross's Turaco, African Finfoot, and Bocage's Akalat are all present around the vicinity of the springs. A night will be spent in Chinsali.

Day 5:Kapishya to Mutinondo (via Shiwa Ngandu)

We will make use of our time around Kapishya, enjoying a breathtaking dawn chorus followed by a wonderful and wholesome breakfast to help prime ourselves for the further exhilarating birding that lies

ahead. For those not yet eager to say goodbye to the hot springs, a brief and final swim can be enjoyed before we ready ourselves to hit the road and make our way to our morning stop at the nearby Shiwa Ngandu. The gardens around this elaborate 1920's English manor house are not too dissimilar from those around Kapishya, and it is here where we hope to enjoy the likes of Black-backed Barbet, Evergreen-forest Warbler, Bocage's Akalat and Laura's Woodland-Warbler. Having maximised our time in the vicinity of the manor, we will begin the trip to Mutinondo, intermittently stopping along the way to do some roadside birding and exploring the numerous wetlands and dambos for any waterbirds and any sign of the inconspicuous 'Black-chinned' Africa Quailfinch; a bird often found frequenting the adjacent grasslands. We will welcome the start of a three-night stay at a lodge near Mpika.

Day 6:Mutinondo Wilderness

Many birders will agree that Mutinondo is one of the most scenically beautiful places in Zambia, if not all of Africa. Its singular landscape is dominated by towering granite inselbergs that preside over a picturesque arena of clear streams and lush woodlands. Some may even say that it is something otherworldly, evoking a feeling of raw, untamed wilderness that harkens back to the days of Livingstone and Stanley. Despite its remote setting, the lodge here is comfortable. The food is excellent, and a fully stocked bar in a scenic spot stands ready to meet all of our sundowner needs. In addition to its great scenic value, Mutinondo is a superb birding venue. Reichard's Seedeater is common, as are a variety of sunbirds. Our biggest avian target is Bar-winged Weaver, a tricky and strange nuthatch-like weaver. The miombo here holds the full range of specialty species including Steirling's Wren-Warbler, and Anchieta's Sunbird, Anchieta's, Whyte's, Black-backed, and Miombo Barbets. If we are lucky, the seasonal swampy marshes (dambos) will be wet and will give us a chance at a variety of difficult species including flufftails, Black-rumped Buttonquail, and the diminutive Locustfinch.

Day 7:Mutinondo Wilderness

Today we will have an entire day devoted to exploring the avian specialities that Mutinondo plays host to. Whilst enjoying the stunning scenery, we'll use our time productively in an attempt to connect with any species we may have had difficulty locating the day earlier, whilst also devoting time to searching for the inconspicuous yet dapper Chestnut-headed Flufftail, the cryptically plumed Whyte's Francolin, vibrantly coloured Anchieta's Sunbirds, and further attempts at the unmistakable Bar-winged Weaver. Of course, with another day spent birding here, comes further incredible culinary perfection and breathtaking sundowners as enjoyed the day before.

Day 8:Mutinondo to Fika Lodge

Whilst enjoying breakfast and some final birding around our accommodation, we bid farewell to Mutinondo and begin the journey to the famed Fika Lodge, which will not only be our accommodation for the evening, but also yet another exceptional miombo birding experience. Although situated alongside one of the major roadways, the lodge itself is surrounded by almost 160 hectares of protected miombo. These pristine, untamed woodlands will present our group with an opportunity at connecting with the likes of Miombo Barbet, Miombo Scrub-Robin, African Spotted Creeper, Souza's Shrike, and Bar-winged Weaver, whilst our ears will remain attuned for the distinct trilling vocalisations of the highly sought-after Black-necked Eremomela. We will overnight at Fika Lodge.

Day 9:Fika Lodge to Chisamba

Having spent the morning continuing our exploration of the pristine miombo woodlands around Fika Lodge, we will depart for the town of Chisamba, which is located north-east of Lusaka. It is here where we will spend our time targeting the country's only endemic species and a sure highlight of our tour: Chaplin's Barbet. This striking, charismatic lover of Sycamore Figs Trees is restricted to the country's south- central woodlands and can often be found congregating around fruiting trees in pairs or small groups. Given that a large portion of this species' range does not fall within protected areas, there has been a noticeable decline in their population over the past couple of years, which has now warranted them being afforded "vulnerable" status. The night will be spent in a lodge at Chisamba.

Day 10:Chisamba to Lower Zambezi

Maximising our opportunities at spending time with Chaplin's Barbet, we will depart for Lower Zambezi after a morning spent birding around Chisamba. The journey to Lower Zambezi will be a lengthy one, but well worth the reward. General roadside birding will be enjoyed en route, but the hot topic of discussion will no doubt be centered around the target bird for the tour's final days. The next two nights will be spent at a river lodge.

Day 11:Chisamba to Lower Zambezi

Rustic, raw, untamed Africa. The perfect idyllic setting for one of the continent's most highly sought after species – the near mythical African Pitta. An early start is imperative as it will maximise our chances of encountering this poorly understood avian gem, which migrates large distances across tropical Africa and has even been known to appear in parking lots and other bizarre locations! The riparian woodland of the Zambezi valley is one of the few reliable places where this species is known to breed annually during a short window between December and January. We will need to be in position as early as possible, listening for the male's strange "buuuuurrruuup" display call, which we'll then chase down until we clamp our eyes onto this multi-coloured jewel. Other species we may encounter over the duration of our pitta quest include African Broadbill, Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo, Livingstone's Flycatcher, Bat-like and Mottled Spinetails, and Eastern Nicator.

Day 12:Lower Zambezi to Lusaka

Our final morning will be spent devoting any necessary additional time that may be needed in ensuring the group's best chances at success in connecting with the elusive African Pitta. Thereafter, we will begin our journey back to the capital of Lusaka where we will share one final dinner before the conclusion of the tour. Departures should be planned for this night or the next day.

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