



A trip highlight was certainly our wonderful encounter with the Pel's Fishing Owl in Liwonde National Park. After playing hard to get all through the first day we finally managed to find a bird at a daytime roost that allowed some marvellous views. (Nik Borrow)

MALAWI

16 - 29 SEPTEMBER 2018

LEADER: NIK BORROW assisted by ABASI JANA

During this tour we visited extensive miombo woodlands, mopane forests, montane copses, rolling open moorlands, dense thickets and riverine marshes and stayed in some extremely comfortable and well-appointed locations, enjoying some superb food and excellent birding. Our adventure began in Malawi's capital city of Lilongwe, where it was hot, dry, dusty and the fires of the dry season had begun. Two full days were spent in the miombo woodlands of Dzalanyama Forest Reserve but because many birds had started nesting the miombo was harder work than we could have wished and of course the roving bird parties were smaller and more discrete. However, we succeeded in finding mouth-watering species such as the localised Stierling's Woodpecker, Pale-billed Hornbills and colourful Anchieta's and Shelley's Sunbirds, enjoyed unbelievably close views of Souza's Shrikes and hunted out a pair of the rather strange Boulder Chat. We

then headed northwards breaking the journey at Luwawa on the Viphya Plateau where Forest Double-collared Sunbirds were easy to see and we also found our first 'Malawi' Cape Batis of the form *dimorpha*. Olive-headed Greenbuls and showy Chapin's Apalis were present whilst Fiery-necked Nightjars put on a good show at dusk. A three nights stay at the extremely comfortable Chelinda Lodge on the Nyika Plateau was pleasurable for the cool mountain air was a glorious change from the hot and humid lowlands and the birding was excellent on the expansive moorlands for wonderful views of Scarlet-tufted Sunbird, Blue Swallow, Montane Widowbird and Denham's Bustard. In the dark woodlands we also scored well with Sharpe's Greenbul, Olive-flanked Ground Robin and the lovely Sharpe's Akalat. Descending from the plateau we explored the miombo woodlands surrounding Vwaza Marsh where we tracked down a family group of unique Babbling Starlings, Böhm's Flycatcher and the striking Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Weaver before moving to the beach resort of Chintheche on the shores of Lake Malawi where nearby we enjoyed fine views of African Broadbills twirling on their perches. A long drive took us back southwards to Zomba where in the small remaining patches of scrubby forest above the town we found Malawi's only endemic, the pretty Yellow-throated Apalis, the near-endemic Thyolo Alethe and the exquisite White-winged Apalis. At Thyolo Mountain itself we scored well with another Thyolo Alethe and a skittish Green-headed Oriole. The tour culminated with a visit to the impressive Liwonde National Park where we sampled the plentiful wildlife. A cruise up the Shire River enabled us to gain an intimate view of the birds and game and highlights were eyeball-to-eyeball views of White-backed Night Heron, the enormous marmalade coloured Pel's Fishing Owl at a daytime roost, a pair of Racket-tailed Rollers, colourful Böhm's Bee-eaters, Brown-breasted Barbet, Speckle-throated Woodpecker, Lilian's Lovebird, Livingstone's Flycatcher and large herds of Southern Sable Antelope. The final tick of the trip was during the return journey to Lilongwe where a small detour gave us an added bonus of the localised Vincent's Bunting which was the icing on the cake! Other avian treasures included Red-winged Francolin, Livingstone's and Schalow's Turacos, Burchell's Coucal, the 'Ruwenzori' form of Montane Nightjar, Scarce Swift, Whyte's Barbet, Moustached Tinkerbird, Miombo Pied Barbet (heard only), Dickinson's Kestrel, the *suahelicus* grey-headed form of Brown-necked Parrot, Fülleborn's Boubou, Rufous-bellied and Miombo Tits, Black-browed Greenbul, Red-capped Crombec, Black-lored, Churring and Wailing Cisticolas, Brown-headed Apalis, Green-backed Camaroptera, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Brown Parisoma, Miombo Blue-eared and Meves's Starlings, Miombo Scrub Robin, White-chested Alethe, Miombo Rock Thrush, Arnot's Chat, Eastern Miombo and Whyte's Double-collared Sunbirds, Southern Brown-throated Weaver, Orange-winged Pytilia, Red-faced Crimsonwing, Red-throated Twinspot, Wood and Striped Pipits, Southern Citril and Reichard's, Black-eared, and Yellow-browed Seedeaters.

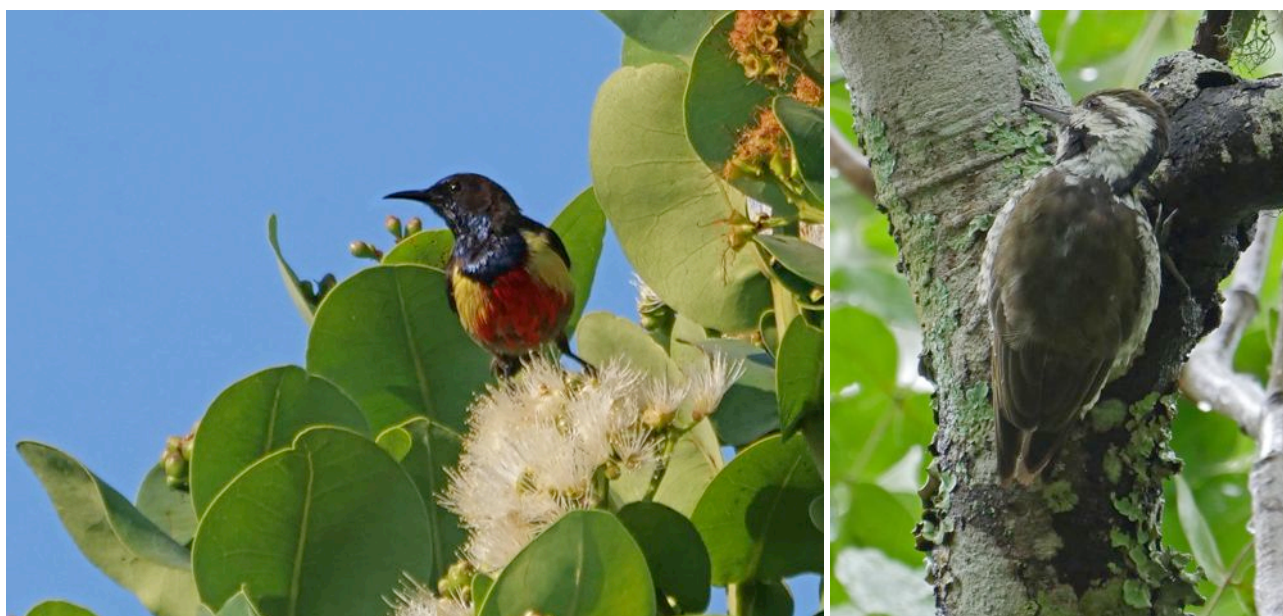


Miombo Blue-eared Starlings (left) were nesting in the garden of our guesthouse in Lilongwe where White-browed Robin-Chats (right) are also vociferous and colourful inhabitants of Lilongwe. (Nik Borrow)

Our arrival in the early afternoon at Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi was followed by refreshingly smooth immigration and customs formalities where our extremely professional outfitters warmly welcomed us and before we knew what was happening we were out of the airport and promptly dragging ourselves across a small dambo in search of the tiny, colourful Locust Finch. This did not go at all according to plan as the area was completely dry and even on fire and only a flock of Orange-breasted Waxbills flew around us. Hence the

start of the tour did not go at all well although we did see a few species during our short walk and the journey to our guesthouse that included Black-headed Heron, Gabar Goshawk, Red-eyed and Laughing Doves, African Palm Swift, Lilac-breasted Roller, Pied Crow, Red-capped Lark, Wire-tailed Swallow, Croaking Cisticola, Tawny-flanked Prinia, African Stonechat, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, African Pied Wagtail, Yellow-throated Longclaw and African Pipit. We dropped our luggage off at our delightful lodge where the gardens held Speckled Mousebird, Dark-capped Bulbul, African Yellow White-eye, Miombo Blue-eared Starling, Kurrichane Thrush, Southern Black Flycatcher, Southern Masked Weaver, Blue Waxbill and the pretty White-browed (or Heuglin's) Robin-Chat, before heading back out to the local nature sanctuary.

Although it was the end of the afternoon and our time was limited we managed to see a few nice birds that included spiky-crested Schalow's Turaco, colourful Orange-breasted Bushshrike, the attractive Red-throated Twinspot and some got a look at a skulking African Broadbill. Other species included Helmeted Guineafowl, Striated and Grey Herons, Common Sandpiper, Tambourine Dove, Brown-hooded and Pied Kingfishers, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Black-backed Puffback, Tropical Boubou, Black-headed Oriole, Fork-tailed Drongo, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Arrow-marked Babbler, Olive, Scarlet-chested and Variable Sunbirds and Spectacled, Holub's Golden and Village Weavers.

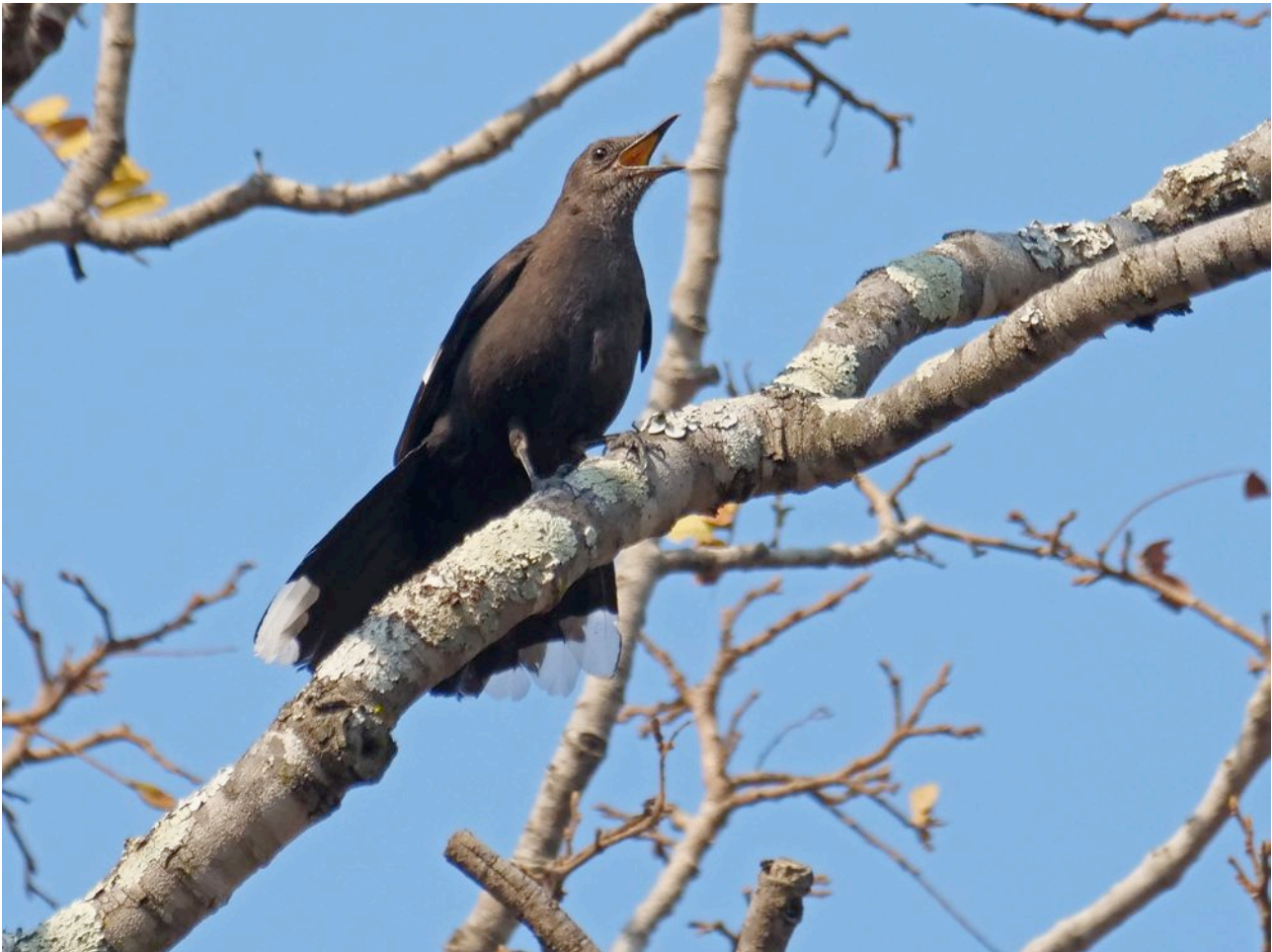


Two of the special birds of Dzalanyama Forest Reserve are the pretty Anchieta's Sunbird (left) and the localised Stierling's Woodpecker (right). We had repeated opportunities to see the latter species, which we currently see on no other tour. (Nik Borrow)

The days begin early in Malawi for it was already light by five in the morning and we left our very comfortable lodge early in order to reach the attractive open woodlands of the famous Dzalanyama Forest Reserve soon after dawn. However, this timing set the pace of the tour and gradually we acclimatised to these early starts in order not to miss the most fruitful (and cooler) parts of the day. The vegetation in the reserve is dominated by miombo, which is a Swahili word for the genus of tree named *Brachystegia*. This distinctive habitat is only found in the southern central part of Africa and is home to a very distinctive avifauna. Our visit was timed in the middle of the dry season at one of the hottest times of year and the dry branches were only beginning to sprout their striking fresh leaves, which here and there were also interspersed with splashes of rich red and orange reminiscent of temperate autumn colours. In recent years there has been much illegal logging in this reserve to the extent that there is now a permanent army camp based there to prevent further extraction although this appeared to be closed during our visit and there was much evidence of tree-felling.

We had two full days to tease the birds out of the extensive miombo, a habitat that is notoriously difficult to work as it can offer extremes of being horrendously empty with the only sound being the buzzing of cicadas or else ridiculously busy as a foraging bird party passes through; often at speed. This year many birds had already settled on their nests so that the hoped-for flocks had not yet formed. The forest is home to a

'Zambezian' endemic, the restricted range and particularly uncommon Stierling's Woodpecker but this tour it turned out to be one of the first birds that we saw upon arrival and during our visit we found between four to seven birds. The pretty little Anchieta's Sunbird is another target species which fell easily on our first day and we all enjoyed good views of this species feeding in some flowering trees. However perhaps the most-wanted specialty was the somewhat strange Boulder Chat and for this species we had to work harder and had to climb up into the rocks around the base of the inselbergs that are a feature of the reserve. Our prolonged first attempt drew a blank and the following day due to a broken bridge we had to undertake a longer walk to reach another outcrop where we met with instantaneous success and were treated to a good display by a pair of this unusual bird. A by-product of the climb to get closer to the birds was a superb Spotted Eagle-Owl that we accidentally flushed and watched as it glared angrily down at us.



Boulder Chats have an extremely localised distribution and are found on the well wooded inselbergs in the reserve. (Nik Borrow)

Our main aim was to see as many of the miombo specialties as we could and although the pace was slow we began to chip away at the list. Noisy Pale-billed Hornbills were seen well, Stierling's Wren-warblers uttered their endless mechanical *tlip-tlip-tlip* calls and a Souza's Shrike allowed a particularly close approach. Black-collared and Whyte's Barbets, Rufous-bellied and Miombo Tits, Red-capped Crombec, Neddicky, African Spotted Creeper, Miombo Rock Thrush, Eastern Miombo Sunbird and Black-eared Seedeater all proved relatively easy to see but we had to work harder to find Striped Pipit and Reichard's Seedeater and we had to wait until the final minutes of our visit to see a superb male Shelley's Sunbird but the wait was worth it!

We did surprisingly well for raptors kicking off with scope views of a perched Ovambo Sparrowhawk upon arrival. African Cuckoo-Hawk was seen well and other species included African Harrier-Hawk, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, Lizard Buzzard, Shikra, Black Sparrowhawk and Augur Buzzard. The skies also held Black (Eastern) Saw-wings which showed off their white underwing coverts as they zipped to and

fro. The small roving bird parties encountered typically consisted of White-crested and Retz's Helmetshrikes, silvery White-breasted Cuckooshrike and Yellow-bellied and Southern Hyliotas. Other species seen during the two days included Red-necked Spurfowl, Ring-necked Dove, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, African Green Pigeon, Klaas's Cuckoo, Striped Kingfisher, Swallow-tailed, Little and European Bee-eaters, African Hoopoe, Green Wood Hoopoe, Common Scimitarbill, Southern Ground Hornbill, Green-backed Honeybird, Lesser, Scaly-throated and Greater Honeyguides, Green-backed (Little Spotted), Bearded and Cardinal Woodpeckers, Chinspot Batis, Black-crowned Tchagra, Brubru, Black Cuckooshrike, Northern Fiscal, African Golden Oriole, African Paradise Flycatcher, White-necked Raven, Barn and Lesser Striped Swallows, Common House Martin, Long-billed Crombec, Red-faced Cisticola, Red-winged Warbler, Yellow-bellied and Green-capped Eremomelas, Violet-backed Starling, White-browed Scrub Robin, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, African Dusky Flycatcher, Familiar Chat, Western Violet-backed and Amethyst Sunbirds, Yellow-throated Petronia, Red-headed Weaver, Black-winged Red Bishop, Orange-winged Pytilia, African Firefinch, Red-backed Mannikin, Yellow-fronted and Brimstone Canaries and Cabanis's Bunting.



The unobtrusive Souza's Shrike allowed close approach (left) and a superb Shelley's Sunbird made a star appearance at the very end of our visit. (Nik Borrow)

Leaving Lilongwe, we made another try for Locust Finch but it was really too dry and we failed again only adding Little Swift, Zitting Cisticola and Yellow-mantled Widowbird. Lack of water also thwarted us at a dam that usually holds Lesser Jacana but the floating vegetation was non-existent and water levels low and the birds were also not present and we had to content ourselves with Western Cattle Egret, Hamerkop, and small numbers of Yellow-billed Duck, Red-billed Teal and Little Grebe. We continued northwards heading towards the Viphyra Plateau but made a stop in another miombo forest reserve en route. Here it was recently burnt and very quiet but nevertheless we found Coqui Francolin, African Barred Owlet, Miombo Scrub Robin and Wood Pipit.

Our destination was Luwawa Forest Lodge situated on the Viphyra plateau amongst a rather barren pine plantation. However, it was a pleasant location for an afternoon walk by the lake and dam where Red-chested Flufftail and African Rail were heard calling and Black Crake, Grey-rumped Swallow and a lovely Half-collared Kingfisher were seen. The garden and woodlands held some good new birds for us with the *strausae* form of Chapin's Apalis coming down from the treetops for us and we also gained excellent views of both Black-browed and Olive-headed Greenbuls, the *dimorpha* 'Malawi' form of Cape Batis and our first Forest Double-collared Sunbirds. Also put on the seen list were Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Lanner Falcon, Lesser Swamp Warbler, Evergreen Forest Warbler, Singing Cisticola, Bar-throated Apalis, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, White-starred Robin, Collared, Bronzy Sunbirds, Bronze Mannikin and Southern Citril. At the end of the day some Fiery-necked Nightjars put on a great show for us.

The following morning after another brief look at the lakeside we continued our journey northwards towards the Nyika Plateau put paused for a while in an open patch of degraded miombo woodland where we have previously seen Babbling Starlings. Sadly, the starlings were nowhere to be seen although we had excellent close up views of the localised Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Weaver. The dry hillsides were fairly devoid of birds although we did add Long-crested Eagle, Meyer's Parrot and Thick-billed Weaver before it was time to move on.



Chapin's Apalis (left) put on a great performance at Luwawa and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Weaver (right) en route to the Nyika Plateau. (Nik Borrow)

Entering into the Nyika National Park we drove through stunted miombo sending up clouds of dust as we went due to it being so dry but climbing higher into cooler air. On the way our only Dickinson's Kestrel of the trip was seen and we made some more roadside stops where we were fortunate to find Brown-headed Apalis along with Brown Parisoma before reaching the plateau itself. We arrived at the extremely comfortable Chelinda Lodge in the heart of the park and settled into our spacious wooden chalets for a three night stay in the cool mountain air.

During the next two days we spent our time exploring the pockets of evergreen forest, the open grasslands and the marshy gullies with their small dams. We woke to views over the open bracken-cloaked, rolling hills that cover vast expanses of this splendid park. The park straddles two countries and after breakfast we set off to the Zambian side of the border and drove along a little used track which eventually led us to a remote patch of forest. The plan was to see as many of the forest specialties as possible but despite the woodlands being filled with song the birds seemed to have a completely different agenda and not all of them gave themselves up easily or without a struggle. Sharpe's Greenbuls were the most straightforward to see and at one point they seemed to be everywhere, creeping through the tangles flicking one wing at a time. The lovely Olive-flanked Ground Robin was heard calling from a distance and then surprised us by appearing just a few metres away from us to allow some excellent views. Sharpe's Akalat teased for a long time until we finally tracked one down in its hiding place and having been discovered, the bird then behaved perfectly and everyone had good views. A fine supporting cast included a fine male Bar-tailed Trogon perched in the canopy above us, Moustached Tinkerbird, Cape (Malawi) Batis, Fülleborn's Boubou, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher and Black-browed Greenbul.

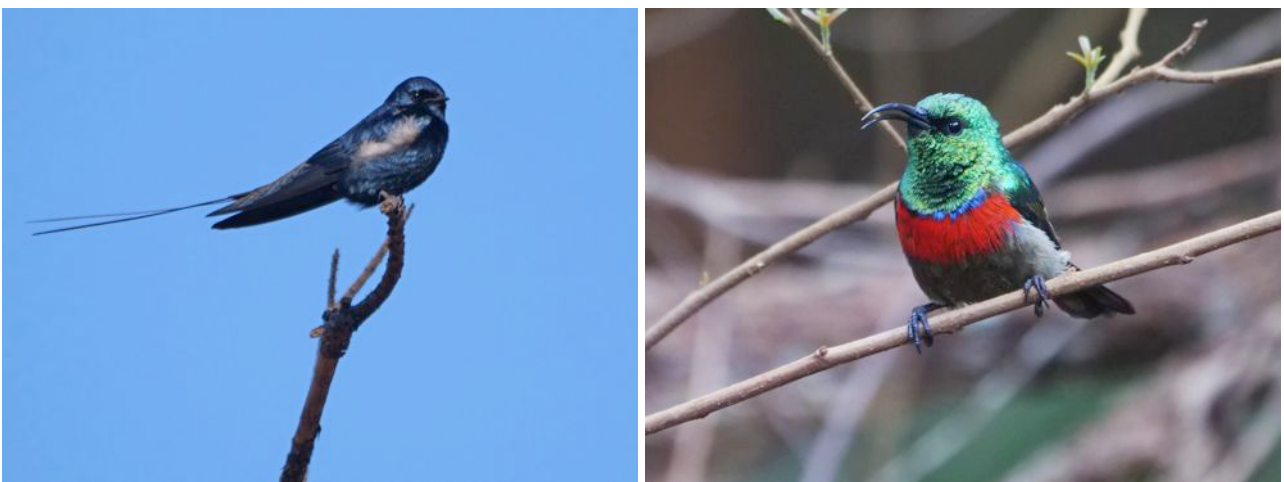
The only species that remained a problem was White-chested Alethe which had only been glimpsed by some at best! As the morning progressed, the birds eventually fell silent and so we decided to give up and try again for the alethe the following day and instead turned our attentions to the open grasslands with its invasive bracken and rocky outcrops. This habitat offered good grazing for mammals such as majestic Eland, striking 'Crawshay's' Zebra, Southern Reedbuck and the appealing Roan Antelope which held a few

Yellow-billed Oxpeckers in attendance. On the drive back, we also found stately Denham's Bustards and some Wing-snapping and Wailing Cisticolas. At night out came the blankets to keep us warm and the spotlights to pierce the darkness and during a night drive we had excellent looks at the 'Usambara' *guttifer* form of Montane Nightjar and a spectacular male Pennant-winged Nightjar. One car was lucky enough to see a Leopard!



Olive-flanked Ground Robin (left) is one of the special skulkers in the Nyika forests. We had superb views of the Usambara 'guttifer' form of Montane Nightjar on the night drives. (Nik Borrow)

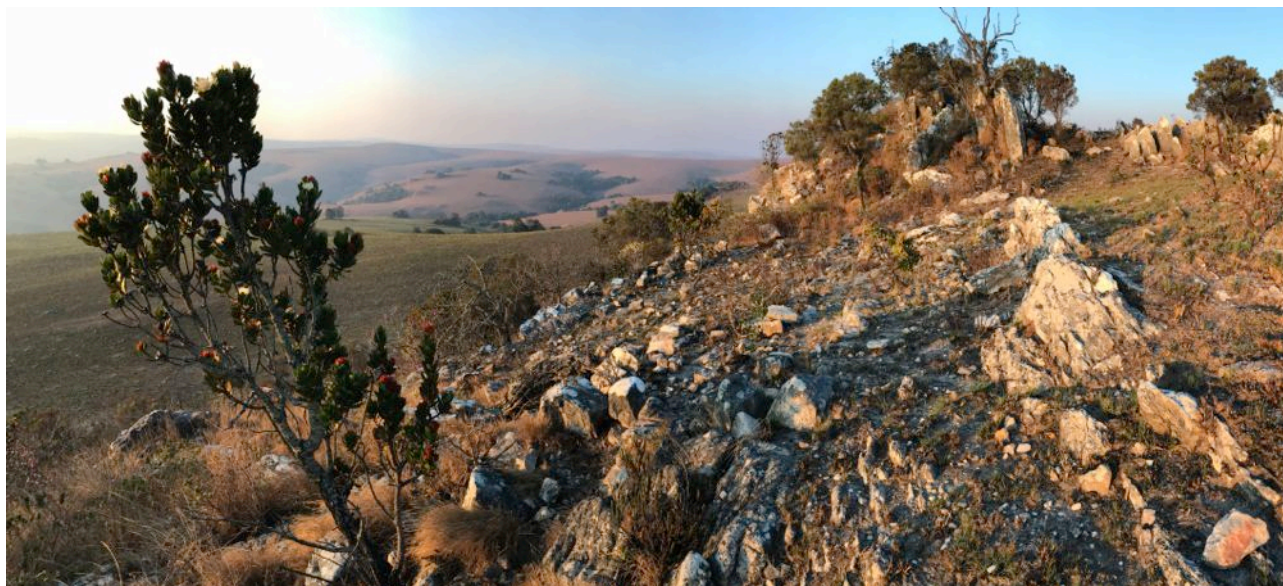
A pre-breakfast walk took us through woodland and the marshy, vegetated gullies where impressive Montane Widowbirds with their spectacular tails drifting behind them were displaying. We savoured our views of glittering elegant Blue Swallows with their long tail streamers perched on the termite mounds or skimming low over the grasses in the company of Angolan and Red-rumped Swallows. A variety of cisticolas as usual either fascinated or repelled but we were pleased to find the restricted range Churring and Black-lored Cisticolas. A few Yellow-browed Seed eaters were encountered and we managed definitive views of the recently split Whyte's Double-collared Sunbird. This area was home to Black-winged Kite, African Olive Pigeon, Dusky Turtle Dove, Giant Kingfisher, Crowned Hornbill, White-headed Saw-wing, Mountain Yellow Warbler, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler, Bar-throated Apalis, Abyssinian Thrush, Cape Robin-Chat, Malachite Sunbird, Baglafaecht Weaver and Yellow-crowned Canary.



Glittering examples: Blue Swallows were in immaculate plumage (left) as was this Whyte's Double-collared Sunbird (right). (Nik Borrow)

We spent the rest of the morning in another forest patch where once again the White-chested Alethe appeared but remained silent although more people managed to get some views of it and a pair of Olive

Woodpeckers was a bonus. In the late afternoon the grasslands yielded Red-winged Francolins, Common Quail, Rufous-naped Lark and the dark montane form of Grassland Pipit (that has been involved in some misleading historical taxonomic confusion with an apparently 'mythical' species known as 'Jackson's Pipit') was seen. In an area where some proteas were flowering we found a pair of glorious Scarlet-tufted Sunbird and enjoyed terrific views of the male, even noting the scarlet tufts that are normally hidden under the wing. The sundowners tasted particularly delicious that evening!



Late afternoon overlooking the Nyika Plateau where the proteas were in flower – prime habitat for Scarlet-tufted Sunbird and the perfect location for a sundowner! (Nik Borrow)

It was time to leave the big skies and spacious heights of the Nyika plateau but paused on the way down to grab a Hildebrandt's Francolin and some airborne Waller's Starlings before descending further to Vwaza Marsh where we had to concentrate on finding one bird in particular. We had missed the Babbling Starling on the way up so this was to be our last chance on the way down. It was quiet to start with and the day was already getting hot but eventually a few faint calls reached our ears and alerted us to a bird party somewhere nearby and then suddenly the starlings were in our sight. It took a while to track them down so that everyone had good views as the birds were moving very fast through the miombo and we had to repeatedly catch up with them. Finally, some birds settled for long enough that we all had views. During our walk we finally caught up with Böhm's Flycatcher and got good views of this unassuming flycatcher and also added a few other species including African Hawk Eagle, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Crested Barbet, White-winged Black Tit and Arnot's Chat.

These recent days had certainly turned up a heap of amazing birds but it was time to move on and the following day we headed eastwards to the shores of Lake Malawi for an overnight stop at Chintheche. This part of Malawi is densely populated with most of the countryside transformed into farmland and little new was seen on the journey although our travels certainly provided some insights into the African way of life. The journey produced Brown Snake Eagle and Yellow-billed Kite and on the edge of some dense forest we found Purple-banded Sunbird, watched displaying African Broadbill and heard Eastern Nicator. It was the end of the day and sadly there was no sign of the hoped for East Coast Akalat. Our hotel garden enabled us to obtain excellent views of several fierce-looking African Barred Owlets in broad daylight. We also saw Burchell's Coucal, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Copper Sunbird and Eastern Golden Weaver. After breakfast we embarked on a long drive south to Zomba.

Our hotel was situated on the plateau high above the town in cooler air and on arrival we visited some remnant hill forest patches where we went in search of Malawi's only endemic, the delightful Yellow-throated Apalis. Most of the slopes at Zomba have been converted to rather birdless pine plantations, but here and there gullies with original montane forest remain and these are home to the recently split (from Bar-throated

and immediately endangered) apalis. Fortunately, we had little problem finding the bird and within minutes of seeing this rarity we also came across a family party of White-winged Apalis; indeed, it was apalis heaven as Black-headed Apalis was also added to our lists here! Other interesting species new for our trip included impressive Livingstone's Turacos which were noisily raiding the fruiting figs alongside White-eared Barbet. A Lemon Dove was seen briefly and new greenbuls included Little and Placid Greenbuls. Mountain Wagtails were on a stream, the attractive little Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler was seen and high in the skies were some Scarce Swifts.



The gorgeous White-winged Apalis (left) was seen at Zomba along with the endemic Yellow-throated Apalis (right). (Nik Borrow)

In the morning we searched long and hard for Thyolo Alethe and finally we found a single bird just by chance which like the White-chested Alethe on the Nyika, was totally silent and unresponsive to playback. The bird was by nature suitably skulking which of course meant that not everyone saw it and as time was running we decided to leave and make a dedicated effort to find it at our next destination on the slopes of the Thyolo Mountain itself. We made a stop en route to look for Green-headed Oriole and although seen it did not show particularly well.



We first saw the Thyolo Alethe (left) at Zomba but managed far better views on the Thyolo Mountain itself where African Wood Owls (right) could be seen around our lodge at night. (Nik Borrow)

Virtually all of the forest on Thyolo Mountain has been cleared and the only surviving tiny patch survives in a far corner of the Satemwa tea estate. It was here that we came to search for some very endangered species and in particular the alethe that is named after the mountain. We had the afternoon and the following morning to track down our quarry. We arrived in time for lunch and checked in to our impressive accommodation in a tea estate colonial style house built in 1936 that held nesting Wire-tailed Swallows. The weather looked promising and immediately afterwards we headed up to a tiny patch of remnant forest where after an ominous period of silence, we were much relieved to hear the calls from an alethe and happily it wasn't too long before we had the bird firmly in our sights sat upon an exposed perch for some excellent views! The forest also held African Goshawk, Broad-billed Roller, Trumpeter Hornbill, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Black-throated Wattle-eye, 'Ludwig's' Square-tailed Drongo, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Green-backed Camaroptera and Dark-backed Weaver and we celebrated the day with a fine evening meal which was followed by sightings of a rare bat; Harrison's Soft-furred Fruit Bat and for some an African Palm Civet and a spectacular display from the resident African Wood Owls.



Our final destination was Liwonde National Park where Hippopotamus were a common sight along the Shire River. (Nik Borrow)

Next, we turned to the serene Shire River and Malawi's famed Liwonde National Park. This year our journey took us through the park by our landcruiser taking in a fine herd of Sable Antelope en route and arriving at the well-appointed Mvuu Camp by lunch time where we were welcomed there by the much-wanted Böhm's Bee-eater near the car parking area! The afternoon was spent on the river exploring its banks from a small boat with which we cruised down the river allowing a marvellous wildlife extravaganza to pass us by. We started by the camp itself where the water's edge held several White-backed Night Herons tucked into the riverbank and we had eyeball-to-eyeball views! Surely Malawi is *the* place to see these amazing creatures.



White-backed Night Herons (left) and African Skimmers (right) were seen during the boat trip on the Shire River. (Nik Borrow)

African Savanna Elephants and vast numbers of Hippos often decorated with Red-billed Oxpeckers dominated the riverbanks and there were also plenty of Common Impala, Ellipsen Waterbuck and Yellow Baboons to be seen. At times the floodplains were covered with waterbirds and these included Egyptian and Spur-winged Geese, Knob-billed and White-faced Whistling Ducks. African Openbills were present and interspersed with Yellow-billed Storks. There were also African Sacred, and Hadada Ibises, Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets, Black-crowned Night Heron, Striated and Squacco Herons, Pink-backed Pelican and Reed and White-breasted Cormorants. A number of African Fish Eagles and even a Western Osprey were stationed along the banks at regular intervals, Black Crakes ran along the shoreline and African Jacanas tripped across the lily pads. Waders included resident Black-winged Stilt, Water Thick-knee, Kittlitz's Plover, African Wattled, Spur-winged and Long-toed Lapwings alongside Palearctic migrants such as Common Ringed Plover, Ruff, Common, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers and Common Greenshank. We also encountered Malachite Kingfisher and large numbers of Pied Kingfishers and a superb flock of African Skimmers resting on a sandbank along with Grey-headed Gull and Gull-billed, Whiskered and White-winged Terns. Other species seen included Palm-nut Vulture, White-backed Vulture, Western Banded Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Martial Eagle, Rufous-winged Cisticola and Southern Brown-throated Weaver.



The highly desirable Racket-tailed Roller (left) was easily seen in the Mopane woodlands of Liwonde National Park and the charming Livingstone's Flycatcher (right) frequented our camp. (Nik Borrow)

The next day was spent exploring on foot and in open-top safari vehicles the waterways, thickets and mopane woodlands that make up the park. A morning walk drew a blank in our quest to see Pel's Fishing Owl but the presence of some elephants in the thicket did not help our quest. However, by way of compensation we enjoyed good views of the grey-headed form of Brown-necked Parrots, plenty of Lilian's Lovebirds and also found the charming Livingstone's Flycatcher that frequented the thickets around our camp. In the woodlands White-browed Sparrow Weavers were nothing less than abundant, Speckle-throated Woodpecker fell relatively easily and we managed to locate a pair of Racket-tailed Rollers during our first morning and obtained some great scope views. Numerous Purple-crested Turacos were feasting on the ripe figs and these trees also held a few Brown-breasted Barbets which allowed prolonged scope views.

Other species seen during our stay included Saddle-billed and Marabou Storks, Bat Hawk, Crowned Eagle, Square-tailed Nightjar, Red-faced Mousebird, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Southern Red-billed Hornbill, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Red-necked Falcon, Grey-headed Bushshrike, Southern Black Tit, Sombre Greenbul, Wattled, Greater Blue-eared and Meves's Starlings, Bearded Scrub Robin, Ashy Flycatcher, Collared Palm Thrush, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Lesser Masked Weaver and Red-billed Firefinch. A nice feature of the tour that we had little difficulty getting used to was a succession of sundowners and in Liwonde we enjoyed watching the sun set with a drink in hand and the chance to spot a Bat Hawk dash past. At night we found Square-tailed Nightjar and mammals such as Marsh and Meller's Mongoose, Thick-tailed Greater

Galago, Cape Porcupine and Central African Large-spotted Genet.



Lilian's Lovebirds (left) were abundant and the restricted range Speckle-throated Woodpecker showed well (right). (Nik Borrow)

Early on our last morning we made another attempt for the Pel's Fishing Owl and this time the elephants were absent and we managed to access the owl's favourite tree and sure enough this huge marmalade-coloured owl was at home and we relished in the scope views of the bird comfortably bedded down in a tall palm tree. This meant that our visit ended on a high but it was not over yet for there was a surprise in store for the group and a special small detour on our drive back to Lilongwe took us to a rocky inselberg where we climbed up the lower slopes and found the very localised and restricted range Vincent's Bunting much to the absolute joy of all present.

All that remained for us now was to pack our bags and head home. The trip had been an enormous success with some stunning views of some very localised species. Malawi is an extremely comfortable country with a good infrastructure that enables the visitor to see many miombo specialities as well as some iconic species such as Pel's Fishing Owl and Boulder Chat alongside true rarities such as Thyolo Alethe, Yellow-throated Apalis, Babbling Starling (and now Vincent's Bunting!). As a birding destination it surely remains one of Africa's best-kept secrets.



Record shot of the final tick of the tour – the localised and restricted range Vincent's Bunting. (Keith Betton)



The superb Böhme's Bee-eater is not a problem to see at Liwonde National Park. (Nik Borrow)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

CR = Critically Endangered, **E** = Endangered, **V** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened, **DD** = Data Deficient.

BIRDS

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* (NL) Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.

Spur-winged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis* Easily seen in Liwonde National Park.

Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* Seen well in Liwonde National Park.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* Easily seen in Liwonde National Park.

Yellow-billed Duck *Anas undulata* 6 on Kasungu Dam and 2 on the Nyika Plateau.

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhynchos* 10 on Kasungu Dam.

Helmeted Guinea fowl *Numida meleagris* Most numerous in Liwonde National Park.

Coqui Francolin *Peliperdix coqui* A female seen well in Chimaliro Forest.

Red-winged Francolin *Scleroptila levaillantii* Small numbers on the Nyika Plateau.

Hildebrandt's Francolin *Pternistis hildebrandti* Two sightings on the Nyika Plateau.

Red-necked Spurfowl (R-n Francolin) *Pternistis afer* Most numerous in Liwonde National Park.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* At least 15 counted on the Nyika Plateau.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* 1 on Kasungu Dam.

Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis* Easily seen in Liwonde National Park.

African Openbill (A Open-billed Stork) *Anastomus lamelligerus* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.

Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* (NL) 1 in Liwonde National Park.

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumenifer* 1 in Liwonde National Park.

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* 2 in Liwonde National Park.

Hadada Ibis (Hadedda I) *Bostrychia hagedash* Easily seen in Liwonde National Park.

White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* Great views of 3 in Liwonde National Park.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Great views in Liwonde National Park.

Striated Heron (Green-backed H) *Butorides striata* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.

Squacco Heron (Common S H) *Ardeola ralloides* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Most numerous in Liwonde National Park.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Most numerous in Liwonde National Park.

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Great Egret (Western G E) *Ardea [alba] alba* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.

Intermediate Egret (Yellow-billed E) *Ardea [intermedia] brachyrhyncha* 2 in Liwonde National Park.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* 3 in Liwonde National Park.

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* A small number of scattered sightings but most common in Liwonde National Park.

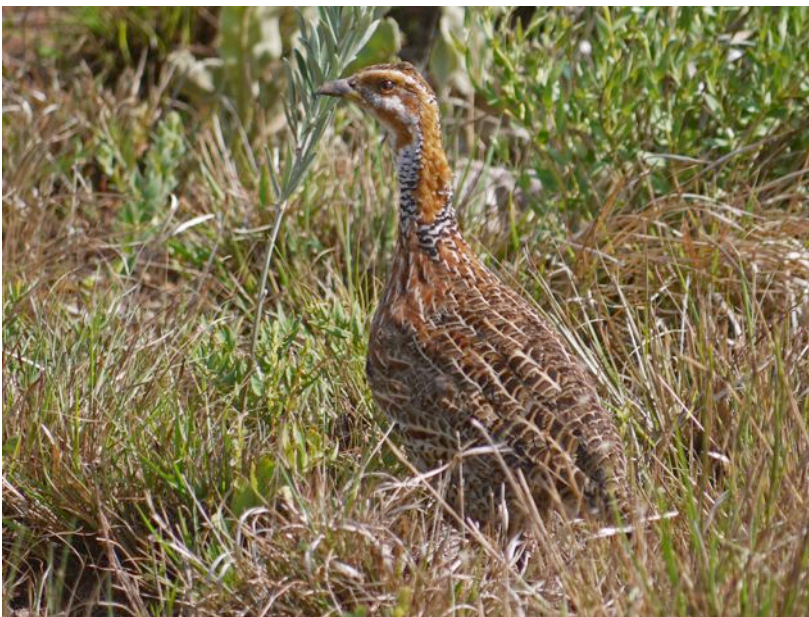
Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* 6 in Liwonde National Park.

Reed Cormorant (Long-tailed C) *Microcarbo africanus* A few in Liwonde National Park.

White-breasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax lucidus* Good numbers in Liwonde National Park.

African Darter *Anhinga rufa* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant in Liwonde National Park.



Small numbers of Red-winged Francolins were seen on the Nyika Plateau (left) and a single Western Osprey was watched in Liwonde National Park (right). (Nik Borrow)

Black-winged Kite (B-shouldered K) *Elanus caeruleus* Just 3 sightings during the tour.

African Harrier-Hawk (Gymnogene) *Polyboroides typus* 4 widespread sightings during the tour.

Palm-nut Vulture (Vulturine Fish Eagle) *Gypohierax angolensis* 1 in Liwonde National Park.

African Cuckoo-Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides* 1 seen well in flight over Dzalanyama Forest Reserve.

White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* (CR) Just 1 in Liwonde National Park.

Black-chested Snake Eagle *Circaetus pectoralis* Sightings at Dzalanyama and en route to Luwawa.

Brown Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinereus* 1 en route to Chintheche.

Western Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinerascens* 2 sightings in Liwonde National Park.
Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* (NT) 4 sightings in Liwonde National Park.
Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus* (NL) 1 at dusk in Liwonde National Park.
Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus* (NT) Excellent views of a perched bird in Liwonde National Park.
Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* A juvenile in Liwonde National Park.
Long-crested Eagle *Lophaetus occipitalis* Just 2 widespread sightings.
Wahlberg's Eagle *Hieraaetus wahlbergi* Singletons at Dzalanyama and a pair at Chimaliro.
African Hawk-Eagle *Aquila spilogaster* A pair in Vwaza Marsh National Park.
Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus* Sightings at Dzalanyama and Chimaliro forests.
Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* Brief flight views for some near the airport.
African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro* Singletons at Satemwa and Liwonde National Park.
Shikra (Little Banded Goshawk) *Accipiter badius* Sightings at Dzalanyama and Liwonde National Park.
Ovambo Sparrowhawk *Accipiter ovampensis* Excellent scope views of a perched bird at Dzalanyama.
Black Sparrowhawk (Great S) *Accipiter melanoleucus* Sightings at Dzalanyama, Luwawa and Satemwa.
African Marsh Harrier *Circus ranivorus* (NL) 1 sighting at Luwawa.
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (NT) 1sighting of this Palearctic migrant on the Nyika Plateau.
Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* A few sightings between Mzuzu and Zomba.
African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* Most numerous in Liwonde NP.
Augur Buzzard *Buteo augur* 1 over Dzalanyama and more sightings on the Nyika Plateau.
Denham's Bustard (Stanley's B) *Neotis denhami* (NT) 5 individuals seen well on the Nyika Plateau.



African Fish Eagle (left) were numerous in Liwonde National Park. Denham's Bustard (right) on the Nyika Plateau. (Nik Borrow)

Red-chested Flufftail *Sarothrura rufa* (H) Heard at Luwawa.
African Rail (A Water R) *Rallus caeruleus* (H) Heard at Luwawa.
Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra* A few widespread sightings.
Water Thick-knee (W Dikkop) *Burhinus vermiculatus* Good numbers along the river in Liwonde NP.
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* 4 in Liwonde National Park.
Long-toed Lapwing (L-t Plover) *Vanellus crassirostris* Just 2 along the river in Liwonde NP.
Spur-winged Lapwing (S-w Plover) *Vanellus spinosus* Common along the river in Liwonde NP.
African Wattled Lapwing (A W Plover) *Vanellus senegallus* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.
Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant in Liwonde National Park.
Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius* 1 in Liwonde National Park.
African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus* Common along the river in Liwonde National Park.
Ruff *Calidris pugnax* 2 of these Palearctic migrants in Liwonde National Park.
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Widespread sightings of these Palearctic migrants.
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* 1 of these Palearctic migrants in Liwonde National Park.
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants in Liwonde National Park.
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants in Liwonde National Park.
African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris* (NT) A flock of 100+ impressed us along the Shire River in Liwonde NP.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* 50+ on the Shire River in Liwonde National Park.
Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.
White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.
Rock Dove (introduced) *Columba livia* Domestic 'table' birds only.
African Olive Pigeon (Rameron P) *Columba arquatrix* Seen on the Zomba and Nyika Plateaus.
Lemon Dove (Cinnamon D) *Columba larvata* Seen on the Zomba and Nyika Plateaus.
Dusky Turtle Dove (Pink-breasted T D) *Streptopelia lugens* Small numbers on the Nyika Plateau.
Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* A common and widespread species.
Ring-necked Dove (Cape Turtle D) *Streptopelia capicola* A very common and widespread species.
Laughing Dove (Palm D) *Spilopelia senegalensis* A few seen on journeys.
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove (Green-s D) *Turtur chalcospilos* Small numbers seen in the dry bush country.
Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer* Small numbers seen in moister habitats than the preceding species.
Tambourine Dove *Turtur tympanistria* More often heard than seen but several good sightings.
African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus* Small numbers at Dzalanyama and Chintcheche.
Livingstone's Turaco *Tauraco livingstonii* Easily seen on Thyolo Mountain and at Kuchawe.
Schalow's Turaco (S's Lourie) *Tauraco schalowi* The more widespread turaco in Malawi.
Purple-crested Turaco (P-c Lourie) *Tauraco porphyreolophus* Wonderful views in Liwonde NP.
Grey Go-away-bird (G Lourie) *Corythaixoides concolor* Several in Liwonde NP.
Burchell's Coucal *Centropus burchellii* A few widespread sightings during the tour.
Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* Seen in Dzalanyama and heard in Lilongwe.
African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus* (H) Heard at Satemwa.
Spotted Eagle-Owl *Bubo africanus* Seen at Dzalanyama in the day and on the Nyika Plateau at night.
Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli* No adjective can do this superb owl justice. Seen well in Liwonde NP.
African Wood Owl *Strix woodfordii* Seen well by those that stayed awake on Thyolo Mountain.
Pearl-spotted Owlet *Glaucidium perlatus* 1 during daytime at Vwaza Marsh.
African Barred Owlet *Glaucidium capense* Super during the day views at Chimaliro and Chintcheche.



Owlfest: Spotted Eagle Owl (left) flushed during the day at Dzalanyama, African Barred Owlet (centre) during the day at Chimaliro and African Wood Owl at Satemwa (right). (Nik Borrow)

Fiery-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus pectoralis* Seen and heard well at dusk at Luwawa.
Montane Nightjar (Usambara N) *Caprimulgus [poliocephalus] guttifer* Many at night on the Nyika Plateau.
Square-tailed Nightjar (Mozambique N, Gabon N) *Caprimulgus fossii* Seen briefly at night in Liwonde NP.
Pennant-winged Nightjar *Caprimulgus vexillarius* Breeding plumage males seen at night on the Nyika Plateau.
Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myoptilus* An intra-African migrant to Malawi; small numbers seen over Kuchawe.
African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus* Common with widespread sightings throughout the tour.
Little Swift *Apus affinis* Widespread sightings during the tour.
Speckled Mousebird *Colius striatus* Widespread sightings during the tour.

Red-faced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus* Sightings in Liwonde National Park.

Bar-tailed Trogon *Apaloderma vittatum* Several seen on the Nyika Plateau.

Racket-tailed Roller *Coracias spatulatus* A pair of these much-wanted birds showed well for us in Liwonde NP.

Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudatus* Widespread sightings during the tour and most numerous in Liwonde NP.

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus* Just 1 at Satemwa.

Grey-headed Kingfisher (Chestnut-bellied K) *Halcyon leucocephala* (NL) Seen by some in Liwonde NP.

Brown-hooded Kingfisher *Halcyon albiventris* Small numbers noted throughout the tour.

Striped Kingfisher *Halcyon chelicuti* Sightings at Dzalanyama and in Liwonde National Park.

Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristatus* Easy to see along the river in Liwonde NP.

Half-collared Kingfisher *Alcedo semitorquata* Excellent scope views at Luwawa.

Giant Kingfisher *Megaceryle maxima* Sightings on the Nyika Plateau and along the river in Liwonde NP.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* Abundant and very easy to see along the river in Liwonde National Park.

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater *Merops hirundineus* Small numbers at Dzalanyama and in Liwonde National Park.

Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus* Easily seen at Dzalanyama and in Liwonde NP.

Böhm's Bee-eater *Merops boehmi* This localised bee-eater was easy to see in Liwonde NP.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* Good numbers were seen at Chintheche and along the Shire River.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* Good numbers of this Palearctic migrant at Dzalanyama.

African Hoopoe *Upupa africana* Small numbers noted throughout the tour.

Green Wood Hoopoe *Phoeniculus purpureus* Small numbers noted throughout the tour.

Common Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas* First seen well at Dzalanyama.

Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* (V) Seen well at Dzalanyama and in Liwonde National Park.

Southern Red-billed Hornbill *Tockus rufirostris* Commonly seen in Liwonde NP.

Crowned Hornbill *Tockus alboterminatus* Small numbers on the Nyika Plateau and in Liwonde National Park.

African Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus* Most numerous in Liwonde NP.

Pale-billed Hornbill *Tockus pallidirostris* Seen well at Dzalanyama and Chimaliro Forest Reserves.



Half-collared Kingfisher (left) at Luwawa and Pale-billed Hornbill (right) at Chimaliro. (Nik Borrow)

Trumpeter Hornbill *Bycanistes bucinator* Easy to see but sounds more like a wailing baby than a trumpet!

White-eared Barbet *Stactolaema leucotis* A few seen at Kuchawe.

Whyte's Barbet *Stactolaema whytii* 1 seen well at Dzalanyama.

Moustached Tinkerbird (M Green T) *Pogoniulus leucomystax* Seen well on the Nyika Plateau.

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird (Golden-r T) *Pogoniulus bilineatus* Seen well at Kuchawe and heard elsewhere.

Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus chrysoconus* Seen well at Dzalanyama and heard elsewhere.

Miombo Pied Barbet *Tricholaema frontata* (H) This elusive species was only heard at Dzalanyama.

Black-collared Barbet *Lybius torquatus* Seen well at Dzalanyama and heard elsewhere.

Brown-breasted Barbet *Lybius melanopterus* Great views of 3 in Liwonde National Park.

Crested Barbet *Trachyphonus vaillantii* Singletons at Vwaza Marsh and Liwonde National Park.

Green-backed Honeybird (Slender-billed Honeyguide) *Prodotiscus zambesiae* 1 at Dzalanyama.

Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor* Widespread sightings during the tour.

Scaly-throated Honeyguide *Indicator variegatus* Seen at Dzalanyama and Chimaliro Forest Reserves.

Greater Honeyguide (Black-throated H) *Indicator indicator* Seen at Dzalanyama and Liwonde National Park.

Speckle-throated Woodpecker (Reichenow's W) *Campethera scriptoricauda* Seen well in Liwonde NP.

Golden-tailed Woodpecker *Campethera abingoni* 1 seen well in Liwonde National Park.

Green-backed Woodpecker (Little Spotted W) *Campethera cailliautii* 2 sightings in Dzalanyama.

Bearded Woodpecker *Chloropicus namaquus* Singletons at Dzalanyama and Chimaliro Forest Reserves.

Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens* Widespread sightings during the tour.

Stierling's Woodpecker ♦ *Dendropicos stierlingi* (NT) Great views of this localised bird at Dzalanyama.

Olive Woodpecker *Dendropicos griseocephalus* A pair on the Nyika Plateau.

Rock Kestrel *Falco rupicolus* Just 1 in the Lilongwe area.

Dickinson's Kestrel *Falco dickinsoni* Just 1 good sighting on the Nyika Plateau.

Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera* Scope views of a perched bird in Liwonde National Park.

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*. 1 for some from the vehicle en route to the Nyika Plateau.

Brown-necked Parrot (Grey-headed P) *Poicephalus [fuscicollis] suahelicus* 2 pairs in Liwonde National Park.

Meyer's Parrot (Brown P) *Poicephalus meyeri* A few were seen in the Vwaza Marsh area.

Brown-headed Parrot *Poicephalus cryptoxanthus* Small numbers in Liwonde National Park.

Lilian's Lovebird (Nyasa L) *Agapornis lilianae* Good numbers seen in Liwonde National Park.

African Broadbill *Smithornis capensis* A male seen well en route to Chintheche and heard elsewhere.

Cape Batis (Malawi B) *Batis [capensis] dimorpha* Seen well on the Nyika Plateau and at Luwawa.

Chinspot Batis *Batis molitor* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

Black-throated Wattle-eye *Platysteira peltata* Seen at Satemwa and heard elsewhere.

White-crested Helmetshrike (W H-s) *Prionops plumatus* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

Retz's Helmetshrike (Red-billed H-s) *Prionops retzii* Seen well at Dzalanyama and the Vwaza area.

Grey-headed Bushshrike *Malaconotus blanchoti* Singletons in Liwonde National Park.



Crested Barbet (left) and Grey-headed Bushshrike (right). (Nik Borrow)

Orange-breasted Bushshrike (Sulphur-b B-s) *Chlorophoneus sulfureopectus* Seen well at Dzalanyama.

Brown-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra australis* Seen at Satemwa and heard at Chintheche.

Black-crowned Tchagra (B-headed T) *Tchagra senegalus* A few widespread sightings.

Black-backed Puffback *Dryoscopus cubla* A commonly encountered and widespread bird.

Fülleborn's Boubou (F's Black B) *Laniarius fülleborni* Seen well on the Nyika Plateau.

Tropical Boubou *Laniarius major* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

Brubru *Nilaus afer* Seen well at Dzalanyama Forest Reserve, in the Vwaza area and in Liwonde NP.

White-breasted Cuckooshrike *Coracina pectoralis* A regularly encountered member of miombo bird parties.

Black Cuckooshrike *Campephaga flava* Singletons at Dzalanyama and Kuchawe.

Souza's Shrike *Lanius souzae* Excellent views at Dzalanyama Forest Reserve.

Northern Fiscal *Lanius humeralis* Widespread sightings throughout the tour. See Note.

African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus* Widespread sightings in appropriate habitat.

Green-headed Oriole *Oriolus chlorocephalus* Now a rare bird in Malawi, 1 seen in the Thyolo area.

Black-headed Oriole (Eastern B-h O) *Oriolus larvatus* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

Square-tailed Drongo (Ludwig's Drongo) *Dicrurus ludwigii* Seen on Thyolo Mountain. See Note.

Fork-tailed Drongo (Common D) *Dicrurus adsimilis* A commonly encountered and widespread bird.

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

Pied Crow *Corvus albus* A commonly encountered and widespread bird.

White-necked Raven (W-naped R) *Corvus albicollis* A common bird on the Nyika Plateau and also seen elsewhere.

White-tailed Blue Flycatcher *Elminia albicauda* Seen at the Vincent's Bunting site.

White-tailed Crested Flycatcher *Elminia albonotata* Seen well at Kuchawe and in the Nyika forests.

White-winged Black Tit *Melaniparus leucomelas* A pair was seen at Vwaza Marsh.

Southern Black Tit *Parus niger* Seen well in Liwonde National Park.

Rufous-bellied Tit *Parus rufiventris* Excellent views in miombo habitat during the tour.

Miombo Tit (Northern Grey T) *Parus griseiventris* Just 1 seen at Chimaliro.

Eastern Nicator *Nicator gularis* Heard at Vizara and seen by some in Liwonde National Park.

Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafr africana* The endemic race *nyikae* was seen well on the Nyika Plateau.

Red-capped Lark *Calandrella cinerea* Singletons seen near the airport.

Dark-capped Bulbul (Black-eyed B) *Pycnonotus tricolor* A commonly encountered and widespread bird.

Black-browed Greenbul *Arizelocichla fusciceps* Seen well at Luwawa and in the Nyika forests.

Olive-headed Greenbul *Arizelocichla olivaceiceps* Seen well at Luwawa and at Kuchawe.

Little Greenbul (L Green Bulbul) *Eurillas virens* Seen on Thyolo Mountain and at Kuchawe.

Sombre Greenbul (S Bulbul, Zanzibar S G) *Andropadus importunus* Seen in Liwonde National Park.

Yellow-bellied Greenbul *Chlorocichla flaviventris*. Seen in Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary and Liwonde National Park.

Terrestrial Brownbul (T Bulbul) *Phyllastrephus terrestris* Seen in Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary and in Liwonde NP.

Placid Greenbul *Phyllastrephus placidus* Seen well at Kuchawe.

Yellow-streaked Greenbul *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus* A wing-flicking greenbul on Thyolo Mountain.

Sharpe's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus alfredi* Great views on the Nyika Plateau on the Zambian side!



Two special greenbuls from the Nyika Plateau; Black-browed Greenbul (left) and Sharpe's Greenbul (right). (Nik Borrow)

White-headed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne albiceps* Small numbers on the Nyika Plateau.

Black Saw-wing (Eastern S-w) *Psalidoprocne [pristoptera] orientalis* Common in the south of Malawi.

Grey-rumped Swallow *Pseudhirundo griseopyga* Seen well at Luwawa and on the Nyika Plateau.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* 1 of these Palearctic migrants at Dzalanyama.

Angolan Swallow *Hirundo angolensis* Small numbers seen on the Nyika Plateau.

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* Widespread sightings during the tour with very tame birds in Liwonde NP.

Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* (V) This beautiful swallow was in breeding plumage on the Nyika Plateau.

Rock Martin (African R M) *Ptyonoprogne fuligula* Small numbers at the Vincent's Bunting site.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* 2 sightings of this Palearctic migrant at Dzalanyama and Nyika Plateau.

Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica* A few widespread sightings.

Mosque Swallow *Cecropis senegalensis* 1 sighting in Liwonde National Park.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Small numbers over the Nyika Plateau.

Long-billed Crombec *Sylvietta rufescens*. Sightings at Dzalanyama and Liwonde National Park.

Red-capped Crombec *Sylvietta ruficapilla* Great looks were obtained at Dzalanyama.

Livingstone's Flycatcher *Erythrocerus livingstonei* Seen well in Liwonde National Park.

Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus ruficapilla* 3 seen at Kuchawe.

Lesser Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* 1 seen at Luwawa.

African Yellow Warbler (Dark-capped Y W) *Iduna natalensis* 2 seen well at Luwawa.

Mountain Yellow Warbler *Iduna similis* A pair was seen well on the Nyika Plateau.

Little Rush Warbler (African Sedge W) *Bradypterus baboecala* (H) Heard at Luwawa.

Cinnamon Bracken Warbler *Bradypterus cinnamomeus* Seen on the Nyika Plateau.

Evergreen Forest Warbler *Bradypterus [lopezi] mariae* Seen at Kuchawe and Luwawa.

Red-faced Cisticola *Cisticola erythrops* (H) Often heard at several localities.

Singing Cisticola *Cisticola cantans* A few widespread sightings during the tour.

Black-lored Cisticola *Cisticola nigriloris* Seen well on the Nyika Plateau.

Churring Cisticola *Cisticola njombe* Easy to see on the Nyika Plateau.



Two special cisticolas from the Nyika Plateau; Black-lored Cisticola (left) and Churring Cisticola (right). (Nik Borrow)

Wailing Cisticola *Cisticola lais* Easy to see on the Nyika Plateau.

Rufous-winged Cisticola *Cisticola galactotes* 1 seen well along the Shire River in Liwonde National Park.

Croaking Cisticola *Cisticola natalensis* Seen well near Liwonde airport.

Neddicky (Piping Cisticola) *Cisticola fulvicapilla* Just 2 sightings at Dzalanyama.

Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed C) *Cisticola juncidis* A few near the airport and at Kasungu Dam.

Wing-snapping Cisticola (Ayres's C) *Cisticola ayresii* Small numbers were seen on the Nyika Plateau.

Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava* Widespread sightings.

Red-winged Warbler *Heliolais erythropterus* 1 seen at Dzalanyama.

Bar-throated Apalis *Apalis thoracica* Seen well at Luwawa and on the Nyika Plateau.

Yellow-throated Apalis *Apalis flavigularis* (E) Just 3 of these rare birds were seen at Kuchawe.

Yellow-breasted Apalis *Apalis flavidia* Widespread sightings during the tour.

White-winged Apalis *Apalis chariessa* (V) Pairs of these beautiful warblers seen well at Thyolo and Kuchawe.

Black-headed Apalis *Apalis melanocephala* Seen on Thyolo Mountain and at Kuchawe.

Chapin's Apalis *Apalis chapini* Excellent views of the race *straussae* at Luwawa and heard on the Nyika Plateau.

Brown-headed Apalis *Apalis alticola* 1 seen well in the Nyika area.

Green-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura* A few sightings plus presumably hybrids in the Liwonde area.

Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brevicaudata* (H) Heard in Lilongwe.

Stierling's Wren-warbler *Calamonastes stierlingi* Seen well at Dzalanyama and heard elsewhere.

Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis*. 1 on the nest at Dzalanyama.

Green-capped Eremomela *Eremomela scotops* Easy to see at Dzalanyama and elsewhere.

Arrow-marked Babbler *Turdoides jardineii* A few at Dzalanyama.

Brown Parisoma *Sylvia lugens* A pair was seen well in the Nyika area.

African Yellow White-eye (Southern Yellow w-e) *Zosterops [senegalensis] anderssoni* Common. See Note.

Yellow-bellied Hyliota (Y-breasted H) *Hyliota flavigaster* Small numbers at Dzalanyama and Chimaliro.

Southern Hyliota (Mashona H) *Hyliota australis* Small numbers at Dzalanyama.

African Spotted Creeper *Salpornis salvadori* Seen well at Dzalanyama.

Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* (LO) Nik saw a flock in Liwonde National Park.

Greater Blue-eared Starling (G B-e Glossy S) *Lamprotornis chalybaeus* Seen well in Liwonde NP.

Miombo Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis elisabeth* Seen well in the Lilongwe and Vwaza areas.

Meves's Starling *Lamprotornis mevesii* Common and easy to see in Liwonde NP.

Violet-backed Starling (Plum-coloured/Amethyst S) *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* Common and widespread.

Red-winged Starling *Onychognathus morio* Small numbers at the Vincent's Bunting site.

Babbling Starling (White-winged B S) *Neocichla gutturalis* Seen in Vwaza Marsh GR.

Yellow-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus africanus* A few seen on the Nyika Plateau.

Red-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* Small numbers seen in Liwonde NP.

Orange Ground Thrush *Geokichla gurneyi* (H) Heard on Thyolo Mountain.

Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyana* Seen well at Dzalanyama and in the Vwaza area.

Abyssinian Thrush *Turdus abyssinicus* Seen on the Nyika Plateau.

Bearded Scrub Robin (Eastern B R) *Cercotrichas quadrivirgata* Great looks in Liwonde National Park.



At present we only encounter the unique Babbling Starling during our Malawi tour (left). Bearded Scrub Robins showed well in Liwonde National Park (right). (Nik Borrow)

Miombo Scrub Robin *Erythropygia barbata* Seen well at Chimaliro and Vwaza Marsh.

White-browed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas leucophrys* 1 was seen at Dzalanyama.

Grey Tit-flycatcher (Fan-tailed/Lead-coloured F) *Myioparus plumbeus* Widespread sightings.

White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher *Dioptrornis fischeri* Small numbers seen at Luwawa and on the Nyika Plateau.

Southern Black Flycatcher *Melaenornis pammelaina* Widespread sightings.

Ashy Flycatcher *Muscicapa caerulea* A pair at the camp in Liwonde National Park.

African Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta* Widespread sightings.

Böhm's Flycatcher *Muscicapa boehmi* Excellent views of this localised flycatcher at Vwaza Marsh.

White-chested Alethe *Pseudaethya fülleborni* 2 sightings in the Nyika forests.

Thyolo Alethe *Pseudaethe choloensis* (E) Everyone saw this bird well at Zomba and on Thyolo Mountain.

Olive-flanked Ground Robin ◊ *Cossypha anomala* Excellent views on the Zambian side of the Nyika Plateau.

Cape Robin-Chat (C R) *Cossypha caffra* Seen well at Kuchawe and on the Nyika Plateau.

White-browed Robin-Chat (Heuglin's R) *Cossypha heuglini* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

White-starred Robin (S R) *Pogonocichla stellata* This pretty bird seen well at Luwawa, Nyika and Kuchawe.

Sharpe's Akalat *Sheppardia sharpei* Excellent views on the Zambian side of the Nyika Plateau.

Collared Palm Thrush *Cichladusa arquata* Easily seen in Liwonde NP.

Miombo Rock Thrush *Monticola angolensis* Several seen well at Dzalanyama.

African Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* Most numerous on the Nyika Plateau.

Arnot's Chat *Myrmecocichla arnotti* A pair at Vwaza Marsh.

Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileate* (NL) Seen by some on the airstrip when arriving in Lilongwe.

Familiar Chat (Red-tailed C) *Oenanthe familiaris* A few at Dzalanyama.

Boulder Chat *Pinarornis plumosus* Excellent views of a pair at Dzalanyama.

Anchieta's Sunbird *Anthreptes anchietae* At least 6 birds seen at Dzalanyama.

Western Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes longuemarei* A male was seen at Dzalanyama.

Collared Sunbird *Hedydipna collaris* Widespread sightings.

Olive Sunbird *Cyanomitra olivacea* Widespread sightings.

Amethyst Sunbird (African Black S) *Chalcomitra amethystina* Scattered sightings in miombo throughout the tour.

Scarlet-chested Sunbird *Chalcomitra senegalensis* Seen well at Lilongwe and in Liwonde National Park.

Bronzy Sunbird *Nectarinia kilimensis* Small numbers at Luwawa.

Malachite Sunbird *Nectarinia famosa* Small numbers on the Nyika Plateau.

Scarlet-tufted Sunbird (S-t Malachite S) *Nectarinia johnstoni* 2 males and a female seen well on the Nyika.



Böhm's Flycatcher (left) was seen well at Vwaza Marsh. *Scarlet-tufted Sunbird* (right) was seen well on the Nyika Plateau. (Nik Borrow)

Eastern Miombo Sunbird (M Double-collared S) *Cinnyris manoensis* Easy to see at Dzalanyama.

Whyte's Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris whytei* Seen well on the Nyika.

Forest Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris fuelleborni* Seen at Luwawa, Nyika and Kuchawe.

Shelley's Sunbird *Cinnyris shelleyi* Excellent views of a male at Dzalanyama.

Purple-banded Sunbird (Little P-b S) *Cinnyris bifasciatus* Small numbers seen at Chintheche.

Variable Sunbird (Yellow-bellied S) *Cinnyris venustus* A few seen at Lilongwe, Dzalanyama and Chimaliro.

Copper Sunbird (Coppery S) *Cinnyris cupreus* A few at Chintheche.

House Sparrow (Introduced) *Passer domesticus* Occasionally seen in towns and villages.

Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* Occasionally seen in towns and villages.

Southern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer diffusus* Good numbers were seen in Liwonde NP.

Yellow-throated Petronia *Gymnoris superciliaris* A common Miombo species.

White-browed Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser mahali* Abundant in Liwonde NP.

Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Weaver (C-mantled S-w) *Plocepasser rufoscapulatus* Seen well in the Vwaza area.

Thick-billed Weaver (Grosbeak W) *Amblyospiza albifrons* Just 1 seen in the Vwaza area.

Baglaffeht Weaver *Ploceus baglaffeht* Just a few on the Nyika Plateau.

Spectacled Weaver *Ploceus ocularis* Widespread sightings in small numbers throughout the tour.

Eastern Golden Weaver (Yellow/African G W) *Ploceus subaureus* Seen in the Chintheche area.

Holub's Golden Weaver (G W) *Ploceus xanthops* Scattered sightings during the tour.

Southern Brown-throated Weaver *Ploceus xanthopterus* Easy to see in Liwonde NP but mainly in non-breeding.

Lesser Masked Weaver *Ploceus intermedius* Small numbers in Liwonde NP.

Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* Seen well in Lilongwe.

Village Weaver (Spotted-backed W) *Ploceus cucullatus* Seen well in Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary.

Dark-backed Weaver (Forest W) *Ploceus bicolor* 2 on Thyolo Mountain.

Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubriceps* Scattered sightings during the tour.

Black-winged Red Bishop (B-w B, Fire-crowned B) *Euplectes hordeaceus* Non-breeding plumages only.

Yellow Bishop (Yellow-rumped Whydah) *Euplectes capensis* Non-breeding plumages only.

Yellow-mantled Widowbird *Euplectes macroura* Seen by the airport, non-breeding plumages only.

Montane Widowbird *Euplectes psammacromius* Breeding plumaged birds on the Nyika Plateau.

Red-collared Widowbird (R-c/R-naped Whydah) *Euplectes ardens* Non-breeding plumages only.

Orange-winged Pytilia (Golden-backed P) *Pytilia afra* (LO) Abasi saw 1 at Dzalanyama.

Red-faced Crimsonwing *Cryptospiza reichenovii* Sightings at Luwawa and Kuchawe.

Red-throated Twinspot (Peter's T) *Hypargos niveoguttatus* First seen well at Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary.



Montane Widowbird (left) in breeding plumage on the Nyika Plateau and Red-throated Twinspot (right). (Nik Borrow)

Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala* Seen in Liwonde National Park.

African Firefinch (Blue-billed F) *Lagonosticta rubricata* Sightings at Dzalanyama and Luwawa.

Blue Waxbill (Southern Cordon-bleu) *Uraeginthus angolensis* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* Flocks at Luwawa, on the Nyika and Satemwa.

Orange-breasted Waxbill (Zebra W) *Amandava subflava* Seen by the airport on the first day.

Bronze Mannikin *Lonchura cucullata* Commonly seen in the south.

Red-backed Mannikin (Rufous-b/Brown-b M) *Lonchura nigriceps* Small numbers at Dzalanyama.

Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* (NL) Just 1 sighting on the Mozambique border.

Mountain Wagtail (Long-tailed W) *Motacilla clara* Seen well at Kuchawe and Satemwa.

African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp* Commonly encountered during the tour.

Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus* First seen by the airport on the first day.

African Pipit (Grassveld, Grassland P) *Anthus cinnamomeus* Widespread sightings.

Wood Pipit (Woodland P) *Anthus nyassae* Seen at Chimaliro and in the Vwaza area.

Striped Pipit *Anthus lineiventris* Great views at Dzalanyama.

Southern Citril *Crithagra hyposticta* Seen well at Luwawa.

Yellow-fronted Canary (Y-eyed C) *Crithagra mozambica* Widespread sightings.

Brimstone Canary (Bully C) *Crithagra sulphurata* Seen well at Dzalanyama and Luwawa.

Reichard's Seedeater (Stripe-breasted Canary) *Crithagra reichardi* A few seen well at Dzalanyama.

Black-eared Seedeater *Crithagra mennelli* Small numbers seen at Dzalanyama and Vwaza Marsh.

Yellow-browed Seedeater *Crithagra whytii* Good views of several on the Nyika Plateau.

Yellow-crowned Canary *Serinus flavivertex* Some large flocks on the Nyika Plateau.

Vincent's Bunting *Emberiza vincenti* A pair en route back to Lilongwe was a great way to end the tour.

Cabanis's Bunting *Emberiza cabanisi* Small numbers seen at Dzalanyama and the Vwaza area.



Harrison's Soft-furred Fruit Bat (left) is a rare bat that seems quite at home at Satemwa. African Elephants (right) are a feature of Liwonde National Park. (Nik Borrow)

MAMMALS

African Elephant *Loxodonta africana* Common in Liwonde NP.

Thick-tailed Greater Galago (T-t Bushbaby) *Otolemur crassicaudatus* At night in Liwonde NP.

Blue Monkey (Sykes's M) *Cercopithecus albogularis* Small numbers on Nyika and Thyolo.

Vervet Monkey (Vervet) *Cercopithecus pygerythrus* Commonly encountered at Lilongwe and Liwonde NP.

Yellow Baboon *Papio cynocephalus* Most commonly encountered in Liwonde NP.

African Savanna Hare *Lepus victoriae* Seen at night on the Nyika Plateau.

Cape Porcupine (South African P) *Hystrix africaeaustralis* A great sighting of 2 at night in Liwonde NP.

Mutable Sun Squirrel *Heliosciurus mutabilis* Several seen at Kuchawe and on Thyolo Mountain.

Smith's Bush Squirrel (South African Tree Squirrel) *Paraxerus cepapi* Easy to see in Liwonde NP.

Chequered Elephant Shrew *Rhynchocyon cirnei* 1 seen by some at Kuchawe.

Leopard *Panthera pardus* Seen by one vehicle at night on the Nyika Plateau.

Marsh Mongoose (Water Mongoose) *Atilax paludinosus* 4 at night in Liwonde NP.

Slender Mongoose *Herpestes sanguinea* Seen in Liwonde NP and at the Vincent's Bunting site.

Meller's Mongoose *Rhynchogale melleri* 1 at night for 1 vehicle in Liwonde NP.

Spotted Hyaena *Crocuta crocuta* (H) Heard at night in Liwonde NP.

African Palm Civet *Nandinia binotata* 1 at night for some at Satemwa.

Central African Large-spotted Genet (Rusty-spotted G) *Genetta maculata* 1 at night in Liwonde NP.

Side-striped Jackal *Canis adustus* 1 in Liwonde NP.

Plain's Zebra (Crawshay's Z) *Equus quagga* Seen well on the Nyika Plateau.

Common Warthog *Phacochoerus africanus* Common in Liwonde NP.

Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius* Abundant in Liwonde NP.

Impala (Common I) *Aepyceros melampus* Abundant in Liwonde NP.

Harvey's Duiker *Cephalophus harveyi* 1 seen by some on the Nyika Plateau.

Roan Antelope (Roan) *Hippotragus equinus* Small numbers on the Nyika Plateau.

Sable Antelope (Southern S A) *Hippotragus niger* Several good sized herds in Liwonde NP.

Waterbuck (Ellipsen W) *Kobus ellipsiprymnus* Common in Liwonde NP.

Klipspringer (Zambian K) *Oreotragus [oreotragus] centralis* At least 3 on the Nyika Plateau.
Southern Reedbuck (Zambian R) *Redunca [arundinum] occidentalis* Common on the Nyika Plateau
Common Duiker (Grey D, Common D) *Sylvicapra grimmia* Several timid animals on the Nyika Plateau.
African Buffalo (Cape B) *Syncerus caffer*. 2 seen in Liwonde National Park.
Common Eland *Taurotragus oryx* A herd of about 40 on the Nyika Plateau.
Bushbuck (Cape B) *Tragelaphus [scriptus] sylvaticus* Seen in Liwonde NP and on the Nyika Plateau.
Greater Kudu (Zambezi K) *Tragelaphus [strepsiceros] zambesiensis* Seen well Liwonde NP.
Harrison's Soft-furred Fruit Bat *Lissonycteris goliath* Several seen roosting at our lodge on Thyolo Mountain.



Mutable Sun Squirrel at Kuchawe (left) and Greater (or Zambezi) Kudu in Liwonde National Park. (Nik Borrow)

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Northern Fiscal *Lanius humeralis* At least some of the birds seen on the Nyika Plateau are hybrids between Southern Fiscal *L. collaris marwitzi* and Northern Fiscal *L. humeralis capelli* and show traces of a white supercilium. Hybrids have been well documented on the plateau. Many authors lump the two forms as a single species in which case it is renamed Fiscal Shrike or Common Fiscal *L. collaris*.

Square-tailed Drongo (Ludwig's Drongo) *Dicrurus ludwigii*

It has recently been suggested that *ludwigii*, the form concerned along with *muenzneri* and *tephrogaster* should be treated as a separate species Ludwig's Drongo *D. ludwigii*. The remaining two western races, *sharpei* and *saturnus* are then named Sharpe's Drongo *D. sharpei*. *Diversification across major biogeographic breaks in the African Shining/Square-tailed Drongos complex (Passeriformes: Dicruridae)* Fuchs, J., Fjelsda, J., Bowie, R. C. K. *Zoologica Scripta* (2016).

African Yellow White-eye (Southern Yellow w-e) *Zosterops [senegalensis] anderssoni*

It has recently been suggested that the form concerned, *anderssoni* be treated as part of a separate species Southern Yellow White-eye *Z. anderssoni*. *A taxonomic review of the genus Zosterops in East Africa, with a revised list of species occurring in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania*. Pearson, D. J. and Turner, D. A. *Scopus* 37(1) (2017).