Malawi – November 2013
Report by Sjef Öllers

Our first visit to Malawi was a fairly relaxed trip with the main aim to see several birds that are restricted to or fairly easy to see in south-central Africa. Birding success was a bit mixed: a decent number of range-restricted/rare/spectacular birds were seen well, but we dipped on interesting species such as green-headed oriole, white-winged apalis, yellow-throated apalis and white-winged babbling-starling. Highlights included Pel’s fishing owl, white-backed night-heron, racket-tailed roller, Thyolo alethe, brown-breasted barbet, both hyliotas, Böhm’s flycatcher, Anchietta’s sunbird, Sousa’s shrike, Böhm’s bee-eater, Livingstone’s flycatcher, black-fronted bush-shrike, bar-tailed trogon, African broadbill and Stierling’s woodpecker. Mammalwatching was much better than expected; some of the more exciting sightings were bushpig (four sightings!), leopard, serval, water mongoose and the unexpected highlight, Meller’s mongoose!!

Tour Operators and Travel Information

I requested quotes from several companies; the most interesting and realistic sounding quotes were given by Wilderness Safaris, Land&Lake Safaris and Kiboko Safaris. Wilderness Safaris was more informative but also a lot more expensive (about 700 USD per person) for the same tour schedule and the same accommodation (except for the two nights in Lilongwe). They may possibly provide larger vehicles and better guides, but at the time I thought the price difference was too large to justify booking with them. Judging from other trip reports Land&Lake Safaris seemed to be reliable, so in the end we booked with them.

Overall Land&Lake Safaris was fine, but it might be worth checking the credentials of your guide with the tour operators. Before I booked, I specifically asked whether our guide would be a birder and this was said to be the case. Unfortunately, their most experienced birding guide, Ben Mwapeyah, had died earlier in 2013 and his replacement, Saidi, turned to be a good all-round wildlife guide, but not a professional-
level guide for birdwatching trips. He knew the whole country well, drove safely, was well-connected, and tried to arrange "special" things (upgrades, etc.) for us, but there were several fundamental problems with his birding skills: he did not know the calls of forest birds very well and often did not have/know the calls of crucial birds (for example, white-winged apalis and green-headed oriole). For forest birds, in particular, he had no idea which specials to look for. Even in Dzalanyama – a place he had visited frequently – there were several specials he had never heard of (Stierling's woodpecker, miombo scrub robin, and a few more). His technique and skill in general were a little limited. He would use the same approach in every habitat, which absolutely didn't work in miombo or montane forest. Particularly annoying was that he tried to confirm every bird or movement he saw. Even if it was clear from the call that it was a common bird (bulbul, puffback, tropical boubou, etc.), he would track the bird down until he had seen it. Nice if you have all the time of the world but a bit of a waste of time to spend so much effort on confirming common birds over and over again. Also almost trivial things like choosing to walk towards the sun with the result that you are just looking at silhouettes of birds happened more often than necessary. On the positive side he had excellent spotting skills and good hearing (and was familiar with the calls of the commoner birds) and to be fair, he did find us some excellent birds and mammals. I am sure that he genuinely did his best to show us the best birds that he was familiar with, but it also seemed like he had had an adequate basic training in birding but never further developed his skills. So I would recommend him as a guide as long as you realize what the limitations are and prepare for that.

The main roads in Malawi were surprisingly good and finding your way seems less problematic than in some of the surrounding countries, but getting to the main national parks and nature reserves can be tricky (Nyika and Dzalanyama in particular) because signposts are usually completely absent. If you have the time to drive yourself and get lost occasionally without spiralling into a personal or marital crisis, a self-drive trip is definitely worth considering. We decided that it was not worth the hassle of wasting a couple of hours every day on finding our way, so we opted for a guided tour.
Police checks along the main road (in particular around larger towns) were frequent; they almost always wanted to see the driver's license, car insurance, car registration details, and for some reason the fire extinguisher. Checks were generally friendly and relaxed affairs.

If you stick to the speed limit (camera traps and in particular speed-guns are quite common), the following driving times are realistic (and allow a few short birding stops en route): Lilongwe to Luwawa Forest Lodge (4.5-5 hours), Luwawa to Thazima Gate, Nyika (5-6 hours), Rumphi to Thazima Gate (45-60 min, the road was in quite good condition), Thazima Gate to Chelinda (3-5 hours, it took us 4 hours with several short birding stops, road was mostly in decent to good condition with only a few bad patches), Chelinda to Makuzi (7-9 hours), Mzuzu to Nkhata Bay (2-3 hours), Nkhata Bay to Makuzi Beach Lodge (about 45-60 min), Makuzi to Nkhotakota/Bua River Lodge (2.5-3 hours), Nkhotakota to Zomba (6-8 hours), Zomba to Satemwa (about 2-2.5 hours), Satemwa to Liwonde (3.5-4 hours), Satemwa to Mulanje village (45-60 min), Liwonde to Lilongwe (5-6 hours), and Lilongwe to Dzalanyama (2 hours, the unpaved stretch near the reserve is very slow and none of the turn-offs are signposted, so ask for directions regularly if you drive yourself). An average of about 60 km/h is doable on the main paved roads (police checks, livestock and people on the road, endless numbers of roadside villages, etc. slow things down considerably). On unpaved roads of decent quality an average of about 35-40 km/h is possible.

Despite the ongoing environmental destruction and excessive poaching, Malawi still offers several excellent wildlife/nature experiences and it is a pleasant, affordable and friendly country to travel in. Nyika and Liwonde National Park in particular were excellent for scenery and wildlife photography. Malawi is also an excellent place to pick up much-wanted and localized birds such as Pel's fishing owl, white-backed night-heron, Böhm's bee-eater, and Livingstone's flycatcher without too much trouble. Mammalwatching was surprisingly good despite the near-complete absence of large carnivores; without trying very hard we scored almost 40 species, much better than I anticipated.

That's how bad we smelled after a full day of game driving
Itinerary

Day 1, November 2: Flight to Malawi (Amsterdam–Heathrow–Addis Ababa–Lilongwe)
Day 2, November 3: Arrival Malawi – Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary
Day 3, November 4: Drive to Luwawa Forest Lodge
Day 4, November 5: Morning Luwawa – Drive to Nyika
Day 5, November 6: Nyika national park
Day 6, November 7: Nyika national park
Day 7, November 8: Nyika national park
Day 8, November 9: Drive from Nyika to Makuzi Beach Lodge
Day 9, November 10: Morning Nkhata Bay Forest / Afternoon Nkhotakota Reserve
Day 10, November 11: Nkhotakota Reserve - Bua River Lodge
Day 11, November 12: Drive to Zomba
Day 12, November 13: Morning Zomba – Afternoon Satemwa
Day 13, November 14: Satemwa Tea Estate/Thyolo Mountain
Day 14, November 15: Daytrip to Mulanje
Day 15, November 16: Morning Thyolo Mountain/Drive to Liwonde national park
Day 16, November 17: Liwonde national park
Day 17, November 18: Liwonde national park
Day 18, November 19: Liwonde national park
Day 19, November 20: Morning Liwonde – afternoon Dzalanyama Forest
Day 20, November 21: Dzalanyama Forest
Day 21, November 22: Morning Dzalanyama Forest– afternoon Lilongwe
Day 22-23, November 23-24: Flights home

Serval in Nyika NP
Preparation and Literature


For general travel information I used trip reports and the excellent Bradt Travel Guide on Malawi.

For Malawi (and Zambia) Birds of Africa South of the Sahara (I. Sinclair and P. Ryan) is probably still the most useful field guide out there, because at least all the species that occur in those countries are shown in the guide. The quality of the images varies, but will be okay to identify most species, in particular the species of interest for Malawi.


For mammals I took Field Guide to African Mammals by J. Kingdon.

For any questions or feedback, contact me at olpa [at] onsneteindhoven.nl

Western Banded Snake Eagle  Bar-tailed Trogon
Accommodation

*Luwawa Forest Lodge:* We were “upgraded” to the honeymoon suite with the request not to use the honeymoon bed, which somewhat undermined the whole point of an upgrade, but otherwise the chalet was fine. The food in the restaurant was good (both dinner and breakfast) and they also gave us an excellent picnic lunch. The garden and the immediate surroundings with a variety of habitats assure excellent birding. All in all, a pleasant place with friendly owners and well worth staying 1-2 nights. I think we were a bit unlucky here because shortly after we had arrived a delegation of Malawian bureaucrats from some government institute showed up. Somehow they seemed to work for/with the Forestry Department, although I doubt they had ever physically or mentally interacted with anything in the natural world. The women seemed obsessed with doing their make-up and dressing up for imaginary cocktail parties whereas the guys mainly seemed to be focused on chain smoking. They were loud and noisy in the restaurant, which was tolerable, but they were unbearably irritating and noisy at night. We dragged our matrasses to the other side of the chalet furthest away from them and put in earplugs, which helped a bit. Our guide had the same experience in his room and didn’t sleep all night.

![Luwawa Forest Lodge (Restaurant/Lounge)](image)

*Chelinda Camp, Nyika:* The bungalows in Chelinda Camp are great. Simple but with all the luxuries you need. You can self-cater here, but we chose the full board option. Not cheap, but Francis, our cook, prepared outstanding food. Best food of the trip after Satemwa. We didn’t stay in the lodge, which is significantly more expensive. The views over the plains are nicer from the lodge, but the camp is more sheltered from the wind and there is good birding right in front of your bungalow. Both the lodge and the camp are run by Wilderness Safaris. Unlike many of their other lodges, the location of both the camp and lodge is a little underwhelming: both are situated against the rather ugly background of a pine plantation and just around the corner there is a small village, which is a bit of a shame as it completely undermines the idea of being on a remote mountain plateau.

In retrospect, I was less impressed with the guiding and the quality of the excursions. We were the only guests here, so there was no reason for Wilderness Safaris not to give us a bit more of a tailor-made approach. On the first evening I asked for a dawn start the next morning (i.e., about 4.45-5am) but it was immediately clear that there was little enthusiasm for this. Eventually we agreed on 5.30, but Watson, the Wilderness guide,
showed up around 6am with a lame excuse (and which is their normal starting time for game drives). One of the reasons for the 6 am start allegedly was the temperature (it would be too cold to leave at 5am). Seriously? Our guide wasn't particularly helpful either as he seemed to pilot the discussion in the direction of a 6am start as well. At some point I was so fed up with their bullshit and arguing about early departures, I just let it go but these unnecessary late starts almost certainly cost us a lot of the forest specials, because there always was a lot of activity in the first 30-45 minutes after sunrise, which was around 5am. We usually arrived at the forest areas in Nyika around 6.30-6.45am, by which time things had slowed down considerably.

*Makuzi Beach Lodge:* attractive beach location but I didn't like the “hey dude, what’s up! I spent all day on the beach, and you?” vibe of the place, but definitely worth staying for one night. The rondavels were fine although maybe due for a bit of upgrading soon. No noisy airconditiong in the rondavels, just a fan, which was a big plus in our book. Dinner was okay if a bit unexciting. Unexpectedly, breakfast was rather poor. Great birding in and around the lodge grounds. Birds are very tame around the lodge so it is a good place for bird photographers.

*Bua River Lodge, Nkhotakota:* one of the unexpected highlights of the trip. Nice safari tents, great location along the Bua River, good food and very peaceful and relaxing. The only place in Malawi where one had the illusion of being in a wilderness area. This place is much cheaper than Tongole Lodge run by Wilderness. Tongole’s chalets and restaurant are spectacularly designed but I am not sure if it is worth the expense just for that, because otherwise I could not see what added value there is in staying at Tongole. Currently neither of the two lodges offer game/night drives, only walks. This might change in the future. The mammal list of the reserve is impressive, but all the exciting bigger mammals are very rare, very shy or even extinct by now (due to relentless poaching pressure) and rarely/never show up near the lodges. During our stay we only
we saw baboons, vervet monkeys, and some very shy bushbucks and common duikers. Elephants show up regularly at Bua River Lodge, but not during our stay. Smaller mammals such as civets, genets, porcupines, and mongooses can be seen at night around the lodge, but luck is needed. Birdwatching is excellent with a lot of miombo species but also a number of mopane/gallery forest species that are usually only seen in the Liwonde area. More information can be found here: [http://buariverlodge.com/](http://buariverlodge.com/).

*Ku Chawe Inn, Zomba:* typical business hotel, but professional and friendly service. Buffet breakfast and dinner were good (both African and “Western” food). From the pleasant garden area one overlooks a forest patch that is good for birding. Great views over the surrounding area as well. Opposite the hotel there are lots of curio stalls, but if you go out early enough, none of the guys are around and you can walk to the trails in peace. We only had time to explore the area around the campsite and the trout farm. The first part of the Mulunguzi Trail cuts through this area (ask for a map at the reception, it is easy to get lost in the maze of tracks on the mountain). We started walking at dawn but even then there were a lot of people around. Lord knows where they all came from, but people were very friendly and none of them hassled us for guiding services, money, etc., but don’t expect quiet birding in pristine forests here. We probably didn’t spend enough time here since we missed both apalis specialties, partly because we arrived rather late at Kuchawe Inn. Maybe it is better to plan the trip in such a way that you have a full afternoon and full morning here.

*Huntingdon House, Satemwa Tea Estate/Thyolo Mountain:* lovely rooms, superb food and outstanding service. If you want to get spoiled, come here. Throughout the estate there are small forest pockets with quite good birding. The water reservoirs near Huntingdon House are also good for birdwatching. From Huntingdon House you can walk to Thyolo Mountain in about one hour (the drive should be 10 minutes or so). If you stay at the self-catering Chawani Bungalow it is only a 15-20 minute walk to Thyolo Mountain. Both Huntingdon and Chawani are surrounded by a lovely garden and a forest fragment, so birding around the accommodations is good. Mammals are few, but blue/Sykes’s monkeys and mutable sun squirrels were common and much more relaxed than in other places. Website: [http://www.huntingdon-malawi.com/](http://www.huntingdon-malawi.com/).

*Mvuu Camp and Mvuu Lodge, Liwonde:* We stayed both in Mvuu Camp and Mvuu Lodge. I didn’t like the vibe of Mvuu Camp. In the two-bed chalets you have very little privacy. Hearing your neighbors doing their business on the toilet is unromantic for most of us. From the two-bed chalets your veranda view is the backside of the kitchen building where instead you could easily have had a stunning river view. A design mistake of the highest order. The family chalets furthest away from the restaurant are very nice though
and have great views over the river and more privacy. Since we were staying four nights we did discuss the option of being moved to a less noisy area of the camp, but in the end they upgraded us to Mvuu Lodge, which was a very nice gesture by Wilderness and much appreciated. Mvuu Lodge has a more secluded location with fantastic views over a floodplain and oxbow lake. The chalets are definitely luxurious. In contrast to Nyika, Wilderness Safaris in Mvuu really did everything both in terms of accommodation and excursions to ensure that we had a great stay.

*Dzialanyama Forest Lodge*: lovely peaceful setting in the forest. Simple, clean rooms. Bathroom and toilet were very clean as well. I liked this place. You need to bring your own food, which will be cooked for you. No electricity, but there is a gas fridge to store food. Much better value than some of the more expensive places we stayed. A little disheartening are the obvious signs of illegal logging and charcoal burning in the forest, and the lack of forest protection and law enforcement in the area.

*Dzialanyama Forest Lodge*

*Mafumu Lodge, Lilongwe*: a rather amateurishly run place with undertrained staff. The rooms were fine if very dark and anonymous. The shower did not work properly in both rooms they gave us (first room: no water at all; second: only scolding hot water). Several times there were problems with the electronic door lock, which were handled rather dumsily, and we had frequent power cuts (see also in the day-to-day accounts). All minor stuff in the grand scheme of things, but for the kind of rates they ask (160 USD) and the upmarket pretensions they have, this place is seriously overpriced.
Day-to-Day Accounts

Day 1-2, November 2-3: Flight to Malawi – Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary

The flight from London to Addis Ababa with Ethiopian Airlines uneventful. In Addis Ababa we were sluiced into a transit area with three toilets for about 2000 travellers in transit. The toilets were as dirty as you would imagine. We managed to find a quiet area that overlooked a parking lot with a small park and what looked like a roadblock with an airport security or police post. Initially my interest went to the birds. We logged common birds such as speckled pigeon, Swainson’s sparrow, yellow-billed kite, dusky turtle dove, cattle egret and greater blue-eared starling. More interesting were northern wheatear, thick-billed raven and hooded vulture. But after a while I got intrigued by the police/security guys at the roadblock. The commanding officer was gesticulating wildly at something behind several roadblock pylons. After a while a human being crawled from behind one of the pylons. The hapless guy tried to get up but got beaten down by the Führer every time. The guy was pleading him to stop but that made matters worse. The guy got hit on the head with a baton at least ten times and really hard. In total he got at least hundred hits all over his body. Seemingly random a few other men were pulled from the street and also got a beating but not as bad as the first guy. The beatings went on for at least an hour. Welcome to Ethiopia!

After one of the more amateurish boarding procedures since the start of aviation we were finally on our way to Lilongwe in a rather old and rundown airplane. Lilongwe airport is tiny and the passport and custom checks were very slow, but the whole procedure was very friendly and relaxed. After a quick stop at Mafumu Lodge to drop our bags we went to Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary. Birding was rather slow, but we eventually got orange-breasted bush-shrike and tambourine dove and had superb views of red-throated twinspot. We were joined by a “guide” with a gun because the area is allegedly not completely safe (robberies have occurred). Just before dusk we returned to the lodge and went straight to the restaurant. Slow service, but good food. We had several power cuts and when we finally had a chance to take a shower it turned out that the shower wasn’t working properly. Annoying! We were too tired to relocate to a new room and just went to bed.

Day 3, November 4: Drive to Luwawa Forest Lodge

The drive to Luwawa was rather boring with miles and miles of wasteland en route. Low numbers of roadside birds was a typical feature in Malawi. Even usually common species such as sparrows, starlings, cattle egrets and other common herons, etc. were thin on the ground on most transfers. After four hours of driving we finally found the first patch of miombo that was more or less intact. We had our lunch break here and made a half-hour walk through the forest. It was very quiet; African cuckoo was the only bird of note.

At the turn-off for Luwawa Lodge there is first a nice stretch of miombo that probably has good birding in the morning (we were there at about 2 pm and saw nothing). Next you pass through a rather depressing area of pine forests, clear-cut areas and small settlements before you reach the lodge, which is surrounded by a small patch of miombo forest, a dam and a swamp/dambo. The lodge is an idyllic place with lovely views over the swamp and the garden. Bird activity in the garden is excellent. The diversity of habitats ensures a long and varied bird list. We made a very nice afternoon hike that passed through all the habitats around the lodge (if you stay longer you can walk some of the longer trails). Some of the more interesting birds seen were rufous-chested...
sparrowhawk, white-starred robin, Malawi batis, Holub’s golden weaver, Schalow’s turaco, bronze sunbird and forest double-collared sunbird and brilliant views of a male red-throated twinspot.

Day 4, November 5: Morning Luwawa – Drive to Nyika

I got up before dawn and it was quite cool, very cloudy and windy with occasional showers. The birding was not as good as yesterday but we still saw (among others) miombo rock thrush, sombre greenbul, dark-capped yellow warbler, Bertram’s weaver, and African marsh harrier.

After breakfast we left around 7 for the long drive to Nyika. The first hours were again dull with long stretches through rather endless stretches of wasteland. Just like yesterday our guide pointed out many areas that in the past were forests, dambos, wetlands, lakes, etc. that used to be good for birding (even not that long ago), but now absolutely nothing was left of the original vegetation. Most interesting birds seen along this rather desolate stretch were Augur buzzard, lizard buzzard, and Schalow’s turaco. South of Mzuzu we passed through an area with beautiful inselbergs but the landscape had been completely ravaged by subsistence farmers. This must have been a very scenic area in the past.

Finally, west of Mzuzu the landscape was getting more interesting and the roadside birds were getting better as well, the highlight being two trumpeter hornbills in a gorge near Rumphi. The road through the pleasant hilly landscape between Rumphi and Nyika was one of the few stretches outside nature reserves that could pass for scenery, although even there the destruction of the remaining forest seemed to take place at rather disturbing levels. On a quiet minor road towards Vwaza with degraded but okay-ish miombo forest we went looking for white-winged babbling starling. It was around 1 pm and very hot and quite windy, so the odds of seeing anything seemed quite bad, but
in rapid succession we found red-billed and pale-billed hornbill, purple-crested turaco, miombo glossy starling, yellow-fronted tinkerbird, cinnamon-breasted rock bunting and best of all a racket-tailed roller. Unfortunately no white-winged babbling starling.

At Thazima gate it was very quiet and a few stops in the lower parts of the park only produced common birds with little bee-eater, olive woodpecker, and ashy flycatcher the most noteworthy. Not a single mammal was seen in the lower parts of the park. On the plateau we managed to find our only Denham’s bustard and a pair of Hildebrandt’s francolins. Near Chelinda we finally started to see mammals (eland, roan, reedbuck, bushbuck and zebra). In the evening a rather persistent viral infection kicked in, which I had picked up three days earlier in Heathrow where that particular day people seemed to take pleasure in sneezing in your face with little inhibition. So I curled up next to the log fire to do my list until Francis served us a superb three-course dinner.

Day 5, November 6: Nyika national park

In the morning we drove to a forest that I thought was Manyenjere Forest, but turned out be a different unnamed forest nearby (which I unfortunately only found out when we left the park). The birding was hard work but eventually we saw a male malachite sunbird, Schalow’s turaco, Eastern mountain greenbul, white-starred robin, black-headed apalis, white-tailed elminia, Malawi batis, black boubou and Ludwig’s double-collared sunbird and got brief but good views of cinnamon bracken warbler. When we came out of the forest, we were elated to find a group of six bushpigs feeding in the open on a hillside about a kilometer away. The two males were massive, almost giant forest hog-like in appearance. We drove to the area where the pigs had been feeding but by the time we got there, they had run into one of the forest patches.

Around noon we made a short walk in the vicinity of the camp but saw little of note. After the walk I felt rather sick again so I decided to rest until afternoon tea.

In the afternoon we went to a small forest patch that Watson thought might be good for mountain thrush but the birding was very disappointing. We saw one Eastern mountain
greenbul and four white-starred robins, but nothing else. We then drove to Chosi Lookout for the sundowner drinks. It was very windy and the sunset was not very good. The nightdrive on the other hand provided much needed compensation for the poor forest birding with one giant eagle owl, three spotted eagle owls, at least 50 scrub hares, three side-striped jackals but best of all prolonged views of a serval! The cat initially was about 200 meters from the car, but then ambled down the road in our direction. It then seemed to disappear in an area of waist-high ferns but I managed to relocate the animal in the fern jungle and we then had superb views of the animal about 10-15 meters from our car. Brilliant end of the day.

Day 6, November 7: Nyika national park

In the morning we walked the Zovo-Chipolo Trail. It was again a struggle to find or hear birds especially in the beginning, but eventually we picked up a few white-starred robins, a family group of at least five bar-tailed trogons, both chinspot and Malawi batis and again we got good views of a Fülleborn’s boubou, but all in all rather disappointing. On our return to the camp we found a male klipspringer on some rocks.

Back in Chelinda Camp after the morning drive I felt really sick and feverish, so I went straight to bed to sleep convinced that I would stay in bed for the rest of the day. After lunch I luckily felt a bit better but went to bed again and slept until afternoon tea time. When I got up I felt a lot better and decided to join the afternoon drive with the aid of another paracetamol. I am glad I did, because it was well worth it. We drove the Chelinda Bridge Loop, a beautiful drive with great scenery. Worth doing just for the scenery on the drive. Amazing was a group of at least 250 elands near Chelinda Lodge. We also saw about 20 roan antelopes, a handful of zebras and 100+ reedbucks. The birding highlight and lowlight was the last surviving wattled crane (at least according to the Wilderness staff). This species has been poached to extinction in Nyika and it is probably a matter of months before this bird will have been killed too. Needless to say that the bird was shy. We also saw red-winged francolin, pallid harrier, black-shouldered kite and commoner species such as rufous-naped lark, African pipit, and stonechat. The nightdrive was disappointing with common duiker, spotted eagle owl, scrub hare and poor views of three Ruwenzori nightjars.

![Montane Marsh Widowbird/African Stonechat](image1.png) ![Wattled Crane](image2.png)

Day 7, November 8: Nyika national park

This morning we visited Chowo Forest. At the forest edge we got brief glimpses of two very shy Sykes’s monkeys. The forest is quite spectacular, but the birding was again a bit of a grind (undoubtedly also because we arrived too late again) and there were long stretches with no activity at all. Sheer perseverance finally gave us superb views of two black-fronted bush-shrikes and a Sharpe’s greenbul, plus excellent views of another pair of Fülleborn’s boubous, bar-tailed trogon and Ludwig’s double-collared sunbird. Inside
the forest I got quite decent views of a large rufous elephant shrew species (possibly chequered) but it ran too fast to be sure which species it was. On the way out along the forest edge we had good views of brimstone canary and small groups of blue swallows. Back at the vehicle, we heard a raptor call very close and it took me a moment to realize it was right above our heads in the sky. It was an adult crowned hawk-eagle. Cool! We made a quick visit to the Zambian resthouse, which is pretty much in ruins but has a superb location. Robin Pope Safaris is rumoured to rebuild it and open a lodge here. On our drive back from the resthouse to the main road, we were about to turn left but for no particular reason I looked down the road in the other direction. A leopard crossed the road but only Watson and me had rather frustrating views of the beast. We raced down the road but we were too late; the leopard had vanished in a small forest patch. In the grasslands on the way back we saw two common quails along the roadside.

After lunch we made a short hike with Watson to the dambo below the dam at Chelinda Camp and found among others brimstone canary, blue swallow, Cape robin-chat, bar-throated apalis and rufous-chested sparrowhawk. Cinnamon bracken warbler remained heard only.

In the afternoon we drove part of the Northern Loop, another area of rolling grasslands but not as pretty as the Chelinda Bridge Loop. Noteworthy birds were red-winged francolin, Eurasian hobby, buffy pipit, and surprisingly yet another Fülleborn’s boubou. The night drive was more productive than the day before, but still a bit underwhelming. Good views of Ruwenzori nightjar this time, plus a marsh owl and another side-striped jackal on the airstrip.

Day 8, November 9: Drive from Nyika to Makuzi Beach Lodge

Watson joined us for the drive back to Thazima Gate for his two-week leave. At Chowo Rocks I asked for a stop to try for scarce swift and maybe mocking cliff-chat. No luck and Watson casually informed me: “The forest in the distance is Manjenyere Forest. It has
the best birding.” Naively I said: “That is the forest where we were the first morning, right?” (since that is what I had requested on the first evening and I told him several times that I wanted to see the akalat). “No, we haven’t been there”. “If it has the best birding and we stay for 4 nights, why did we not go there?” Awkward silence and back we went to the car. We made a longer stop in the lower acacia section of the park, where we found brown-headed apalis, miombo rock thrush, white-headed saw-wing, black-crowned tchagra but no brown parisoma.

The drive from Mzuzu to Nkhata had the most attractive scenery in the country outside the nature reserves. The road leads through pleasant hilly country with several forest tracts still intact although far from pristine. We arrived at Makuzi Beach late afternoon so I only birded a bit around the lodge. Nothing amazing was seen, but there were birds everywhere and many of them were not shy. Best sightings were red-necked falcon, Eastern bearded scrub robin and a large roost of African green pigeons.

Day 9, November 10: Morning Nkhata Bay Forest/Afternoon Nkholtakota Reserve

This morning we visited a forest fragment about 10 km south of Nkhata Bay. The drive to the forest took 30-35 minutes from Makuzi. When we got there, it was surprisingly quiet along the forest edge. We entered the forest on a poacher’s trail. We had barely entered the forest when I found a male African broadbill perched at eye level. Brilliant. Despite the fact that we were rather late, I nevertheless tried to call in East coast akalat. I only got a half-hearted response in the distance once but couldn't find the bird. Narina trogon remained heard only too although I did not try to call it in with my MP3 player because we have seen this species already quite often. After our excellent start with the broadbill the birding was excessively slow and we only saw a few common species. The forest was littered with snares and all kinds of Rambo 1-like contraptions. Quite depressing. There was a bit of excitement when we found a mammal high up in a tree: I assumed it would be another squirrel but it turned out to be a slender mongoose (had never seen them this high up at canopy level).
After breakfast there was some time to bird in and around the lodge garden. I picked up black-throated wattle-eye, a variety of sunbird species, yellow-bellied apalis, and many common species (white-browed robin-chat, several weavers, yellow white-eye, etc.)

The drive from Makuzi to Bua River Lodge was unexciting but relatively short. We arrived at Bua River Lodge around lunchtime. The entrance and parking area at the lodge are a bit underwhelming, but things quickly get better if you walk down to the reception and restaurant. The views over the river from the chalets and the restaurant are great. We installed ourselves in the tent on the little island in the middle of the Bua River. Unfortunately the river was unusually dry and only a few pools remained around the lodge, but I loved the peaceful setting of the place. Birding around our tent and along the dry riverbed in the afternoon produced among others white-breasted cuckooshrike, Burchell’s coucal, giant kingfisher, swee waxbill, trumpeter hornbill, black-collared barbet and Wahlberg’s eagle. After midnight I went out twice to spotlight around my tent and two of the waterholes near the tent, but I saw nothing. Porcupine, water mongoose (and several other mongoose species), civet, lesser bushbaby and rusty-spotted genet have all been seen around the camp.

Day 10, November 11: Nkhoktakota Reserve - Bua River Lodge

I got up around 4.45 and wanted to walk through the dry riverbed but didn't need to walk more than 100 meters because there was activity everywhere. Southern banded snake eagle, Böhm's bee-eater, black stork, lesser honeyguide, Retz's helmetshrike, orange-breasted bush-shrike, black scimitarbill, purple-crested turaco and Eurasian honey buzzard were some of the better sightings.

For walks further way from the lodge hiring an armed park ranger is compulsory. Our park ranger for the morning walk was a friendly young guy, but he showed up fashionably late and by 6.20 we were finally on our way. We walked to the falls and then
hiked up to the plateau above the river in order to walk back to the lodge through a stretch of miombo forest. The walk through the dry riverbed to the falls produced black stork, several common wader species, brown-headed, pied and giant kingfisher, African fish eagle, a distant juvenile martial eagle, and crowned hornbill. By the time we got to the miombo forest it was already hot and pale-billed hornbill and black-headed oriole were the only birds of note.

In the afternoon we walked the Miombo Loop Trail. Things started off nicely with Whyte's barbet in a fruiting fig tree in the gallery forest along the riverbed, orange-winged pytilia, another black stork and a distant lappet-faced vulture. In the fig tree we also found two mutable sun squirrels. Initially the bird activity in the miombo forest was pretty bad, but eventually we did see several interesting birds such as African pygmy kingfisher, grey-hooded kingfisher and what I think was a placid greenbul. Half an hour before sunset we finally ran into a decent flock that included miombo blue-eared starling, chestnut-bellied tit, and golden-tailed woodpecker.

A quick spotlighting trip before dinner produced several very responsive African barred owlets (at least four pairs responded!) but we only got silhouetted flight views of the pair closest to the lodge. We did have pretty good views of a roosting fruitbat in a fruiting fig tree near the lodge.

**Day 11, November 12: Drive to Zomba**

When I got up I found a rather shy broad-billed roller perched in a tree near the tent. For our morning birding we drove to the entrance gate of the park, where we quickly found a largish flock that kept us busy for at least an hour. Highlights were both hyliola species, cardinal and golden-tailed woodpecker, green-capped eremomela, white helmetshrike, Arnot’s chat, red-billed woodhoopoe, and many African paradise flycatchers. We also saw two very shy common duikers.

After breakfast it was unfortunately time to leave this lovely place and we had the long drive to Zomba ahead of us. The drive was rather boring again. Only between Liwonde town and Zomba we found some good habitat and made a quick birding stop, which produced broad-billed roller, purple-crested turaco and African green pigeon. Around 3.30 pm we arrived at Kuchawe Inn.

In the afternoon (from 4.15pm) we explored the grounds of the trout farm (well sign-posted on the plateau). This was a good move. Pretty much the first bird I saw there was a Thyolo alethe. The bird was in open country and not shy at all. It was very flighty and behaved more like a flycatcher. We had excellent views for about 2-3 minutes before it disappeared into an area with dense undergrowth. In the same area we also found a male white-tailed elminia. We slowly walked a quiet trail along a small forest stream at the far end of the trout farm. Forest wagtails were everywhere and a tambourine dove showed well. Livingstone’s turaco was surprisingly common along this trail. And we finally got good views of stripe-cheeked greenbul. Sykes's monkeys were a common sight but they were relatively shy.

**Day 12, November 13: Morning Zomba – Afternoon Satemwa**

Our guide would only pick us up around 7.30 so we got up at dawn and walked down to the Mulunguizi Trail and explored the campsite area and the entrance road to the trout farm. In this area we found white-eared barbet, white-starred robin, stripe-cheeked greenbul, rameron pigeon, and white-headed saw-wing, but no apalises other than bar-throated. On our way back to Kuchawe Inn we had good views of an African goshawk in
flight. In the garden at Kuchawe Inn a pair of forest weavers and Livingstone's turaco showed nicely.

After our guide had picked us up at Kuchawe Inn we drove to the botanical garden to look for white-winged apalis. I was really annoyed when I found out that he didn't have any calls for this species despite having told Land & Lake beforehand that this was a target species. We spent quite some time in the area in and around the botanical garden, but without the calls and our late arrival I wasn't too surprised that we dipped on the apalis. A cracking male red-throated twinspot, white-eared barbet, forest weaver, blue-spotted wood-dove, a variety of greenbulbs, yellow-rumped tinkerbird and what must have been a half-collared kingfisher were the most interesting sightings here. Around 10 we left for the short drive to Satemwa, I hadn't done much research on this place, which was a bit of last-minute addition. We were glad we did, because it is a wonderful place.

In the afternoon our guide Lamick and I explored a forest fragment below the lodge (and the lodge garden). Best birds were a pair of African broadbills that showed well in a patch of plantation forest. We also saw Eastern bearded scrub-robins, broad-billed roller, brown-crowned tchagra, two tambourine doves, little and yellow-bellied greenbul and Livingstone's turaco. Narina trogon, emerald cuckoo and African golden oriole remained heard only. In the tea fields near the lodge we flushed a pair of red-necked francolins.

**Day 13, November 14: Satemwa Tea Estate/Thyolo Mountain**

We got up at 4.30 to walk up to Thyolo Mountain. The walk takes about 45 minutes if you walk in a steady pace. My main target here was green-headed oriole. When we arrived, we heard the birds calling with some regularity but never really close. During our first venture off-trail we flushed a largish owl (probably a spotted eagle owl) and got good views of forest weaver, which were surprisingly common. They were usually together with two or three square-tailed drongos. Mutable sun squirrels were quite common and confiding. Bird activity was a bit on and off, but we also picked up trumpeter hornbill, little and southern mountain greenbul. We also had superb views of a pair of silvery-cheeked hornbills (a very good sighting according to our guide). By 7 am we still hadn't seen the oriole, so we headed a bit higher up in the forest. Right on the forest edge we finally heard one calling very close. We played and mimicked its call and the bird came closer. Unfortunately the bird was calling from an area with very dense understory. It was clear we were not going to see the bird from where we were standing. When we tried to find a better vantage point, the bird had probably taken off because the calls stopped. We walked back to the main trail in the forest and suddenly heard the oriole call right in front of us. Just when I had located the bird in the subcanopy of the massive tree in front of us, it took off again. Aaargh. We heard the birds call several times but never this close again. At some point the forest got quieter and quieter, so we gave up and walked down to have a late breakfast.

In the afternoon we went to a forest fragment close to Chawani Bungalow. On our way up we found a female greater honeyguide and malachite sunbird along a small stream. In the forest it was very quiet and we saw very little. When we got out of the forest we found a decent flock feeding on the forest edge. Best birds seen were little greenbul, green-capped eremomela, tambourine dove, bru bru, and malachite sunbird.

On our way back we walked past several water reservoirs that were good for weavers. Excellent views of thick-billed, spectacled, brown-throated and African golden weaver.
Day 14, November 15: Daytrip to Mulanje

We had included a visit to Mulanje because we were curious about the scenery, which turned out to be excellent indeed, and I somewhat regretted that we hadn’t included a short 1-2 night hiking trip up the plateau. Our day trip to Mulanje was a fairly relaxed affair and despite the fact that we were in the field during the worst birding hours (from about 9 am to 2 pm) we saw quite a good number of birds. In the Mulanje foothills we encountered a single white stork. We parked our car at Likhubula. From the parking lot we saw a young African hawk eagle.

On our way up to Likhubula waterfall, there was a slow trickle of birds. Best were Eastern bearded scrub-robin, yellow-bellied waxbill, blue-grey flycatcher, yellow-rumped and yellow-fronted tinkerbird. During the lunchbreak at the falls we saw honey buzzard, steppe buzzard and white-necked raven.

Most day hikers walk the same route back but luckily our guide suggested an alternative route that passed through excellent miombo. In a rocky area we encountered golden-breasted bunting and familiar chat, various flycatcher species and rufous-bellied tit. A big surprise was a pair of pale batises. We had excellent close views, but it took me a while (and several checks in the field guide) to be sure that it was this species since we also saw family groups of chinspot batises, of which the juveniles with their mottled backs look surprisingly similar to the pale batises. Further down the mountain we encountered a flock that included rufous-bellied tit, golden-tailed woodpecker, red-capped crombec, Retz’s helmetshrike and chinspot batis.

In the afternoon (back at Satemwa) I went out on my own and checked out another forest patch not far from Huntingdon House. Things started off a little frustrating because I flushed two interesting birds: a cuckoo (probably African) and a large sparrowhawk/goshawk species (black?), but I had good views of a male black-throated wattle-eye, forest weaver, white-eared barbet, and green-backed cameroptera among others.

![Mulanje Mountains](image.jpg)

Day 15, November 16: Morning Thyolo Mountain/Drive to Liwonde national park

This morning was the last chance for green-headed oriole. We left even earlier and raced up the mountain. Unfortunately it was very windy and unusually warm (even this early); only a few birds were calling when we arrived at the forest. Bird activity in general was poor. Best birds in the forest were trumpeter hornbill, white-eared barbet, and yellow-streaked greenbul. The last half hour we waited in a rather open spot in the forest to see what would pass by. This strategy worked out pretty well and we saw quite a decent
number of birds including another black-fronted bush-shrike, but the oriole simply wouldn't show. We searched for three hours nonstop and only got close-ish to the oriole twice, but it was clear that today it just was not going to happen. Around 8.15 we had to leave and went back to Huntingdon House. After a last delicious breakfast we left for Liwonde around 9.45. We entered the park via the Chinguni Hills gate (don't take this route after rain, you will get stuck). We quickly found a large buffalo herd on one of the floodplains plus common species such as impala, elephant, warthog, yellow baboon and vervet monkey. Most interesting birds were African hawk eagle, bateleur, red-billed woodhoopoe and common scimitarbill. We arrived at Mvuu Camp rather late. The welcome ceremony and introductory talk took forever, so by the time we were in our tents, we could put on a clean shirt, head for afternoon tea and then jump in the vehicle for our afternoon drive. The daytime part was a bit tame with mostly common mammals and birds. Remarkable, however, was the large number of very old animals that would never survive if there was a healthy population of large carnivores. We saw numerous kudus, impalas and warthogs that could barely walk from old age. After a nice sundowner stop we set off for the night drive. Within 5 minutes we had a water mongoose, which gave excellent and prolonged views but a little too far for good pictures. After checking out a wounded and slightly wary hippo in a mud pool we found a porcupine and then a group of three mongooses, which the guide identified without hesitation as Meller's mongoose. It took me a while to take it all in, but a very distinctive beast with the large bushy tail. A bit further we found another Meller's mongoose, this time only 6-7 meters from the car. Brilliant views but just when I grabbed my camera he decided to disappear in a burrow.

Young Olive Baboon (left) and Vervet Monkey (right)

It had been a very long day with no time to take a break so we rushed to the restaurant with the idea to have a quick dinner and then finally relax a bit and go to bed early. When we got to the restaurant we noticed that there was neither food nor any other guests. It turned out that it was the "traditional evening" with African food and a ceremony with dance and "narration" at a special location. Oh joy! This turned out to be a tacky and long-winded affair with an embarrassing take on Malawi's history and culture. The host of the ceremony even managed to introduce the infamous Hastings Banda as a "so-called dictator" under whose rule "things really weren't so bad". Not sure what they were thinking at Wilderness Safaris but this whole thing was completely off the mark. We were really knackered and in need of some serious sleep but the drumming and chanting went on for hours after we had left.

**Day 16, November 17: Liwonde national park**

Around 5 we left for our morning walk with our friendly guide, Stanford, and sharp-eyed tracker/spotter, Emmanuel. Near the lodge we saw a slender mongoose. Our quest for
green twinspot was unsuccessful but we did find a Livingstone’s flycatcher and long-billed crombec. In a group of fever trees we scored Klaas’s cuckoo, brown-headed parrot, Lillian’s lovebird, broad-billed roller and grey lourie. On the floodplains near the lodge we located a family group of Dickinson kestrels breeding in one of the palms and a covey of red-necked francolins.

Around 8 we joined the boat safari: as expected we saw lots of waterbirds including Goliath heron, black-crowned night-heron, green-backed, black-headed, grey and squacco heron, great white and little egret, openbill and yellow-billed stork, sacred and hadada ibis, five kingfisher species, several Tringa sandpiper species, and a few ruffs. We also found a southern banded snake eagle perched in a tree along the river. We checked out a stretch of gallery forest where Pel’s fishing owl had been seen every now and then, but no luck.
In the afternoon we first checked out a stake-out for Pel’s Fishing Owl, which was basically the area around the parking lot near the jetty if you approach the park by car from the western side. Any large trees around the parking area should be checked (especially trees with a cinnamon-coloured bark), but the area is a favorite elephant haunt and you need to be accompanied by a park ranger. This area is also a good spot for the brown-breasted barbet (lots of fig trees). We found the owl almost immediately, but it was rather shy and flew off rather quickly. We then continued our boat safari upriver but pretty much saw the same species as this morning. New were black-winged stilt and white-faced whistling duck. The night drive was moderately exciting with rusty-spotted genet, white-tailed mongoose, common duiker, spotted eagle owl and Mozambique nightjar.

**Day 17, November 18: Liwonde national park**

Unfortunately my wife did not feel well this morning, so she stayed in and it was just me and Stanford this morning. This was a shame because this morning turned out to be the best boat trip of our stay in Liwonde. We went downstream again. Near the lodge we had spectacular views of at least five different white-backed night-herons. A bit further on we suddenly flushed a massive bird from a low overhanging tree branch next to the riverbank; it turned out to be a Pel’s fishing owl! Luckily the bird landed in a large tree right next to the river. We had excellent views for at least 20 minutes, when we agreed it was time to move on and leave the bird in peace. We had to continue downstream for about an hour to reach several larger sandbanks in the river. Luckily a large group of skimmers was still present. We studied these fascinating birds for about 20-30 minutes and also witnessed a rather impressive battle between two hippos, which scared the skimmers and gulls enough to fly a few rounds over the sandbanks. On our way back a small group of blue-cheeked bee-eaters was hunting along the river. According to Stanford, these had just arrived. He hadn’t seen them yet this season.

![African Skimmers and Grey-headed Gulls](image)

In the afternoon we visited the Rhino Sanctuary, which proved to be very productive. Right from the start we could start ticking: crested barbet, striped kingfisher and African hoopoe were new for the trip and we had very good views of a relaxed immature martial eagle. White-browed sparrow-weaver and red-billed hornbill were extremely common
in this part of the park. We also encountered several very large elephant bulls, and witnessed an entertaining mock charge by one of them. Deeper in the mopane forest we found two shy zebras and a beautiful very dark male sable. After battling our way through a nasty tse tse infested section we bumped into two Lichtenstein’s hartebeests and had decent views of a four-toed elephant shrew.

In the same area we also found a herd of at least 100 buffaloes. We then went back to one of the waterholes that we had visited earlier. In this area we encountered in quick succession a bushpig, a large elephant bull, two more sable males and another two bushpigs! After all this excitement the night drive was surprisingly unproductive although a warthog and yet another bushpig together in the spotlight was excellent!

Day 18, November 19: Liwonde national park

This morning we opted for a mix of walking and driving to check out a few stakeouts for owls. At our first stop we were supposed to find African barred owlet but the tree had been claimed by a pair of African wood owls. To our surprise we also found two large downy chicks. In the same area we also tried for green twinspot but again no luck, although we did see black-collared barbet and Hildebrandt francolin. Another longer walk produced two ground hornbills and a Verreaux’s eagle owl on a daytime roost. Close to the camp we did a last short walk to search for the twinspots. No joy with the twinspots but two red-backed shrikes and a male white-bellied sunbird were nice sightings. The twinspots are sometimes also seen in the quieter areas with dense undergrowth in the Camp and Lodge, but you need to be very lucky.
By midmorning one of the guides, Nick, an expat from the UK, who had just returned from a short stay home, invited us for an impromptu late morning gamedrive to try for swallow-tailed bee-eaters. We checked out a few spots where they had been seen reliably a few weeks back but the birds had already moved on but we did get great views of another ground hornbill. Even more interesting was a group of elephants, of which one of the females had just given birth to a baby. The baby was still having trouble standing up and was at best a couple of hours old; it was interesting to see how the rest of the group interacted with the mother and the newborn. We did not stay long because the animals were clearly nervous and a little stressed.

In the afternoon we repeated this morning’s routine and did a mix of walking and driving; we had excellent views of a male redheaded weaver, two palmnut vultures and we saw the African wood owl family again. Most exciting moment was when the undergrowth started moving; a hippo materialized out of nothing but after a few adrenaline-filled seconds the animal regained his calm and just stared at us in a grumpy way. Next we drove through the palm savannah and floodplains south of the lodge, where we encountered a single banded mongoose, but little else. It was clear that a storm was building up so we headed back to the lodge a little earlier and got back just before dark. We had planned to do a late night drive anyway.

Just before we finished our dinner it had stopped raining, so after dinner we could set off for our late night drive. It was quite amazing to see how much rain had fallen in such a short time because large areas were completely inundated. The drive started off nicely with the rather Fellini/Sorrentino-esque sighting of two saddle-billed storks in the spotlight. Stylish exuberance in perfection. Mozambique nightjars were now calling everywhere (cool sound) and we finally got really good views of them. We finally also caught up with two thick-tailed bushbabies after having hearing them cry for a couple of days. In the mopane forest we scored another white-tailed mongoose (again a very pale pinkish sandy individual) and a rusty-spotted genet. Almost back in camp we found a marsh mongoose, which was close to the vehicle, but kept moving too restlessly to get a
decent photo. It was a shame we had to leave tomorrow, because it was obvious that the rain seemed to kick off all kinds of new activity.

Day 19, November 20: Morning Liwonde – afternoon Dzalanyama Forest

On our last morning in Liwonde there was one major score to settle: brown-breasted barbet. We had kept an eye open for this species, but not yet found them. We first went back to the jetty on the other side of the river, so basically the same area where the Pel's fishing owls sometimes roost. There are several very large fig trees in that area. We had only walked for 2-3 minutes when we noticed a largish bird on a tree. When I got it in my bins it was clear it was the barbet, but 1-2 seconds later it flew off. I could follow it in flight for another five seconds and it was definitely the barbet, but very frustrating and unsatisfying views. We checked out several other fig trees and birds kept flying in and out (including black-collared barbet, plum-coloured starling, and purple crested turaco), but not our target.

Stanford suggested trying out a different area a bit further downstream. There were indeed a lot of fruiting fig trees but the area appeared to be completely dead. We strolled around for a while but eventually had to give up because we still had to drive to Dzalanyama that day. Only 200 meters from the boat, I saw two barbets land in a fig tree. I assumed it would be the usual black-collared, but incredibly they were two brown-breasted barbets. We could watch them for about 10 minutes but then really had to walk back to the boat. 100 meters from the boat we noticed that elephants were crossing the river (they are incredibly fast and strong swimmers if they have to) and they seemed to be heading straight for the area where we had landed the boat. Walking back to the lodge was no option since we were on the wrong side of the river. Only some 10-15 meters away from the boat the elephants suddenly made a sharp turn and steered away from the boat. Not sure if they recognize the boats and stay away from them, but we were glad they did. On the boat ride back to the lodge we had nice views of a male Eurasian golden oriole.

The long drive to Dzalanyama was mostly uneventful. We did see more roadside birds than usual, but nothing of note. We arrived at the simple, but very pleasant Dzalanyama Forest Lodge about 30 minutes before it got dark. A male miombo rock thrush was the most exciting bird seen around the lodge.
Day 20, November 21: Dzalanyama Forest

Early in the morning we explored the area around the lodge. We had prolonged views of a pair of Klaas’s cuckoos quickly followed by 2-3 spotted creepers and a miombo pied barbet (which were both a little distant and rather restless). After the initial burst of activity at dawn, things slowed down rather shockingly. It took at least an hour before things picked up again. Best sightings were white-breasted cuckoo-shrike, a female Diederick’s cuckoo and a male Coqui francolin.

After breakfast we explored the dambo south of the lodge. This is an excellent area with many different habitats despite the ongoing destruction of the miombo and gallery forest. On the way to the dambo we saw the first Sousa’s shrike. In the dry grassy area at the far end of the dambo we flushed a fiery-necked nightjar.

In the miombo we had several decent flocks with some interesting sightings: a female Eurasian golden oriole and a green-backed woodpecker (the bird’s breast was clearly spotted not streaked, see trip list). We also flushed two common duikers. On our way back we stumbled on a crowned hawk-eagle on the nest! We observed the bird from a distance but had superb views for at least 10 minutes when we decided to leave the bird in peace.

After lunch my wife and I made a short walk around the lodge. It was hot but we still found piping cisticola, miombo scrub-robin, groundscraper thrush, forest buzzard, and a group of white helmetshrikes.
In the afternoon we drove to a rocky area about halfway between the entrance gate and the village. The area was badly damaged by illegal logging, charcoal burning and fires. We did see a group of white helmetshrikes and Eurasian bee-eaters being very excited about something, but we couldn't determine what they were excited about. We moved away from the area where people were burning charcoal to a quieter part on the rocky hill. Almost immediately we saw a boulder chat here. I knew that they were quite big, but somehow I was still surprised by their actual size. I had already read this in almost every trip report but indeed none of the drawings in the guide books seem to catch the essence and jizz of this strange bird. The bird performed nicely and hopped from rock to rock about 25-30 meters away. Eventually a second bird joined and we could follow them for about 15 minutes. We walked down the hill again and close to the road we had good views of Sousa's shrike. We then explored the forest on the other side of the road but apart from a flushed scrub hare we saw nothing. Since it was already quite late in the afternoon I suggested that we should slowly drive along the road and stop for any activity and then get out of the car. This paid off almost immediately. After five minutes of driving there was a decent flock right next to the road. We got good views of mashona hyliota (adults and juveniles). It was a little difficult to decide to focus on which bird to focus, but for a while we mainly saw the usual flock birds (yellow white eye, black-headed oriole, fork-tailed drongo, plum-coloured starling, etc.). When the flock seemed to have passed we continued in the direction of another dambo close to the park entrance. Within five minutes we had Anchietta’s sunbird, miombo wren-warbler and Boehm’s flycatcher. Wow! I had already given up on the sunbird and the flycatcher but these were very welcome last-minute additions. A quick scan around the dambo only got us a pair of wattled lapwings and a scrub hare. We drove back to the lodge when it was getting dark, but we didn’t see any mammals, nightjars or owls.

![Boulder Chat](image1.png) ![Southern Hyliota](image2.png)

**Day 21, November 22: Morning Dzalanyama Forest- afternoon Lilongwe**

In the morning we visited the dambo again but took a slightly different route. The crowned eagle that we saw yesterday was still there. It was now perched on a dead tree about 250 meters from the nest. The bird was again surprisingly relaxed and allowed superb views for at least 10-15 minutes. We looked in the nest from a distance for a minute and twice we saw two small chicks peek out. We then explored the miombo around the dambo where we eventually did find a pretty good mixed flock but we didn’t see anything new. In a rocky area we had decent but rather distant views of a mocking cliff-chat. We walked back to the dambo (picking up spotted creeper on the way). We found a wetter area in the dambo where we saw several yellow-throated longclaws, quite a lot of groups with whydahs/widowbirds/bishops, all in non-breeding/transitional plumage (but some could be identified down to species level) and we flushed what must have been a flufftail. On our way back to the car we walked through a thin strip of “gallery forest” on the edge of the dambo. Here we flushed an owl,
but luckily I managed to see where it landed. It turned out to be an African barred owlet, the species we had dipped on in Liwonde. Excellent. The bird was very relaxed and we could watch it for quite a while.

![African Barred Owlet](image1)

![Schalow’s Turaco](image2)

The above account may suggest that it was excellent action-packed birding all the time in Dzalanyama but the birding was actually very hard work (and some luck is really needed here). We were out in the forest almost non-stop from dawn to dusk and most of the time there was little or no activity at all. Typical miombo birding. Between about 10 am and 3.30 pm any bird activity appeared to be concentrated in transitional areas (along rivers, dambo edges, rocky areas, etc.): pure miombo was usually completely dead during that period.

![Dzalanyama Forest: the image to the right shows the view from the dambo](image3)

On our way out back to Lilongwe we saw flappet lark, brimstone canary, scarlet-chested sunbird, black-shouldered kite, pin-tailed whydah, African pipit, and green-winged pytilia in the farmland just outside Dzalanyama Forest.

By about 3 pm we were back in Lilongwe at Mafumu Lodge. We went to the restaurant to have our last G&Ts on the veranda and relax a bit. ”Sir, we have no tonic” What??!! A coke then. No luck either. Only Fanta. How can you have almost no standard soft drinks if you run a place in the center of Lilongwe! So I ordered a coffee and cake. I first checked whether they had cake and indeed they confirmed they did. After 30 minutes
the cake and coffee (without milk) came. I took one bite of the cake and it was clear that this cake was days if not weeks over date and hard as a brick. I would probably have been sick if I had eaten it. They were friendly and apologetic about it and brought me new cake. This cake was also far from fresh, it was already stale and probably a couple of days old or so, but okay at least you wouldn’t get sick from it. Then 15 minutes later the milk for the coffee came. In total it took about one hour to order and get served one beer and one coffee with stale cake. A bit later we ordered dinner. We ordered a burger with a side salad. They informed us that one of the ingredients for the burger was missing. Fine. When the food came after more than one hour, we got two tiny pieces of toasted bread with some chopped onion, cheese and lettuce. All the main ingredients that should have been in the dish were missing. We told them that this was ridiculous and a long and annoying discussion followed. We then found out that their previous chef (who had cooked the excellent food on the first night) had left and was replaced by a new one. Then 30 minutes after we had gone back to our rooms, they called us in our room and tried to reopen the discussion again and get back on the agreement made earlier. All in all, a very tiring place.

**Day 22-23, November 23-24: Flights home**

From Lilongwe to Blantyre there was a lot of turbulence and the airplane landed in Blantyre really fast and really hard, so fast that initially I wasn’t quite sure whether we would overshoot the runway. Back in Addis Ababa we thought that we were lucky not to be quarantined in the transit area and allowed into the main hall, and indeed there was one toilet more per gender although they had run out of money to put locks on the toilet door. Again it was remarkable how rude and unfriendly some people were: the guy at the security check was just unbelievably rude hurling personal belongings of passengers several meters through the air over the scanning apparatus! The surreal highlight were two girls who worked at one of the airport shops; they came up to two young Chinese guys that sat next to us and yelled in their faces: “You from China? Yes!! You go home, China bad”, and then walked back to the shop.

(*False-coloured*) **Reedbucks in Nyika NP**
Trip Lists

In the trip lists below I don’t follow any particular nomenclature/checklist for birds and mammals and just pick the name that makes most sense to me.

A very useful checklist for the birds of Nyika can be downloaded here:
http://www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org/Library/Nyika%20bird%20checklist_FDL.pdf

Index

LNS = Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary  
NYI = Nyika National Park  
NYI area = the area between Rumphi and the Thazima park gate of Nyika national park; the landscape near Rumphi is mainly cultivated fields but closer to the park there is more miombo although it appears that it is being destroyed rather rapidly  
MKZ = Makuzi Beach Lodge and immediate surroundings  
ZOM = Zomba area, this includes the botanical gardens, the area around Kuchawe Inn, the Mulunguzi Trail including the area around the trout farm and the camp site. The map in the Southern African Birdfinder is fine, but for longer walks it is handy to have the map that is available at Kuchawe Inn as a back-up. These may only be available for guests, but it is worth asking at the reception.  
SAT = Satemwa Tea Estate/Huntingdon House, the remnant forest patch on Thyolo Mountain is part of the estate, but I have mentioned notable sightings of birds in that forest patch separately  
LIW = Liwonde National Park  
DZA = Dzalanyama Forest Reserve; only the sites between the entrance gate, lodge and the dambo (C in the Birdfinder) were visited. We did not visit the gallery forest along the river (D in the Birdfinder).
MAMMAL LIST

Sykes's Monkey *Cercopithecus mitis* – brief views of two in Chowo Forest in NYI, more than ten in the area around the trout farm in ZOM, two in the botanical gardens in ZOM, very easy to see and sometimes relatively confiding in SAT (seen on every forest walk there)

Yellow Baboon *Papio cynocephalus* – common, a few times seen outside reserves, seen in NYI, MUL, DZA, and LIW (abundant there)

Vervet Monkey *Chlorocebus pygerythus* – fairly common: several large groups in NKH, a few small groups in SAT, common in LIW.

![Olive Baboon](image1.png) ![Sykes's Monkey](image2.png)

Thick-tailed (aka Greater) Galago *Otolemur crassicaudatus* – one on Nov 17 and two on Nov 19.

[Wahlberg's or Peters's Epauletted Fruit Bat *Epomophorus crypturus/wahlbergi* – while spotlighting for owls around the lodge in NKH we saw a large fruitbat both in flight and perched, which was probably one of these two species. It seemed too dark for Straw-coloured Fruit Bat.]

[Egyptian fruit bat *Rousettus aegyptiacus* – in SAT we saw a group of about 10-12 small fruits bats, which may have been this species]

Four-toed Sengi *Petrodromus tetradactylus* – one flushed in LNS, one seen reasonably well in LIW-RHI

[Checkered Sengi *Rhynchocyon cirnei* – very frustrating sighting, a large russet-coloured elephant shrew was seen for a few seconds running over the forest floor. I could not see a checkered pattern but often the checkered pattern is not that obvious. Based on the size it may have been this species, but not sure what other elephant shrews occur]

Scrub Hare *Lepus Saxatalis* – seen on all night drives in NYI where particularly common on the airstrip, about 3-7 on every night drive in LIW

Mutable Sun Squirrel *Heliosciurus mutabilis* – one in LNS, two feeding in a fig tree on Nov. 11 in NKH, one in Nkwadzi Forest Reserve on Nov. 10, 1-4 daily at SAT/Thyolo Mountain, a few seen in LIW. These large squirrels were often quite confusing because there was a lot of colour variation and some had rather thin, faintly barred tails while others had thick bushier tails with no obvious bars on the tail. Size was about the same for all of them and all were clearly much larger than Smith’s Bush Squirrel, so they were probably all this species.

Smith's Bush Squirrel *Paraxerus cepapi* – very common in LIW, easy to photograph in Mvuu Camp and Mvuu Lodge.
South African Porcupine *Hystrix australis* – fresh tracks but no sightings in NYI, one each on the night drives on Nov. 16 and 19 in LIW

Central African Large-spotted/Rusty-spotted Genet *Genetta maculata* – only seen in LIW: two on the night drive on Nov. 17 and one on Nov. 19.

Marsh Mongoose *Atilax paludinosus* – twice superb views of a single animal in LIW (Nov. 16 and 19)

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White-tailed Mongoose *Ichneumia albicauda* – two sightings on night drives in LIW: one on Nov. 17 and another one on Nov. 19

Slender Mongoose *Galerella sanguinea* – one in Nkwadzi Forest on Nov. 10, one that appeared to be a juvenile was seen in front of our tent in Mvuu Camp on Nov. 16, and one during a morning walk in LIW on the outskirts of Mvuu Camp on Nov. 17

Banded Mongoose *Mungos mungo* – only one in LIW on Nov. 19.

Meller’s Mongoose *Rhynchogale melleri* – superb views of one animal only 6-7 meters from the vehicle. Unfortunately, it disappeared into a hiding place before I could take a picture. A more distant sighting (about 30-40 meters) of three mongooses was almost certainly this species as well!! The bushy tapered tail was seen clearly for one animal (and the local guide had no doubts about the identification).

*Spotted Hyena Crocuta crocuta* – heard only in NYI

Leopard *Panthera pardus* – poor views of one that was briefly seen while crossing the road near the Zambian resthouse in NYI on Nov. 8

Serval *Leptailurus serval* – one seen very well in NYI on Nov. 6, our guide saw another one in LIW when he visited Liwonde city to see his family

Side-striped Jackal *Canis adustus* – 3 and 1 seen on the airstrip on two night drives in NIY

African Bush Elephant *Loxodonta africana* – common in LIW

Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius* – common in LIW

Burchell’s Zebra *Equus burchelli* – about 10-20 daily in NYI, two shy animals in LIW-RHI
Warthog *Phacochoerus africanus* – relatively scarce in NYI (only four sightings during our stay), very common in LIW
Bushpig *Potamochoerus larvatus* – six including two large males in NYI seen mid-morning when we exited Zovo-Chipolo Forest on Nov. 6, one alone and two in LIW-RHI and two close to Mvuu Camp/Lodge on a night drive in LIW
African Buffalo *Syncerus caffer* – several large herds (100 animals) in LIW
Lichtenstein’s Hartebeest *Alcelaphus lichtensteinii* – two in LIW-RHI
Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus (centralis)* – a male on rocks near Chowo Forest, NYI
Common Eland *Tragelaphus oryx* – several small herds of 3-25 animals were seen daily in NYI, but on Nov. 7 we saw a spectacular herd of at least 250 animals.
Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus* – 1-5 daily in NYI, three sightings of very shy animals in NKH (even the ones near the lodge were shy), fairly common in LIW
Greater Kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros (zambesiensis)* – fairly common in LIW (5-25 daily)
[Red Forest/Blue Duiker – only droppings and tracks in NYI]
Bush (aka Common) Duiker *Sylvicapra grimmia* – one flushed in LNS, 2-5 daily in NYI, a very shy pair at the gate in NKH, about a handful daytime sightings in LIW and also a few seen on night drives there, two mid-morning in DZA
Roan Antelope *Hippotragus equinus* – between 20 and 40 daily in NYI
Sable Antelope *Hippotragus niger* – three sightings of single males in LIW-RHI
Impala *Aepyceros melampus* – common in LIW
Waterbuck *Kobus ellipsiprymnus* – common on floodplains along the Shire River in LIW
Southern Reedbuck *Redunca arundinum* – common in NYI, >100 daily

*The three main trunk positions*
BIRD LIST

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – one on the dammed pond in front of Chelinda Camp
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* – about 20-25 in MKZ, common along the Shire River in LIW

![Great Cormorants](image)

Long-tailed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus* – one at LUW, 3-5 daily in NKH, 1-5 daily along the Shire River in LIW
African Darter *Anhinga rufa* – one along the Shire River in LIW on Nov. 17
African Openbill *Anastomus lamelligerus* – common in LIW (>20 daily)

![African Openbill and Nile Crocodile](image)
Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* – several sightings of (probably the same) two birds in NKH
Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* – one in NKH
White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* – one at the base of Mulanje Mountain
Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* - two were seen while spotlighting on our last night drive in LIW, probably the same birds were seen close to Mvuu Lodge/Camp the next morning
Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumenifer* – only about 5-6 in LIW on Nov. 16
Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis* – fairly common in LIW (5-15 daily)
Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* – very common in NKH, also seen in LNS, LIW, and SAT
Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea* – one in NKH, two in SAT, about 2-4 daily in LIW
Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanoccephala* – about 8-9 sightings en route, one along the Shire River in LIW
Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* – two along the Shire River in LIW
Great White Egret *Ardea alba* – fairly common (10-15 daily) on boat safaris along the Shire River in LIW, sporadically seen en route
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* – one in NKH, one in SAT, fairly common (10-15) along the Shire River in LIW
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – surprisingly little seen en route (about 8-9 sightings), decent numbers (20-40 in LIW), two in LUW
Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* – fairly common (5-10) on boat safaris along the Shire River in LIW, 1-2 were usually in the lagoon in front of Mvuu Lodge.
Green-backed (aka Striated) Heron *Butorides striata* – about 3-5 along the Bua River in NKH, usually 1-2 on boat safaris in LIW.
Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* - about 20-30 on a roost in front of Mvuu Lodge, individuals and small groups were seen along the Shire River
White-backed Night-Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* – a maximum of five birds were seen on a roost near Mvuu Camp. A single bird that was obviously roosting in very dense vegetation right next to our chalet in Mvuu Lodge was chased out by vervet monkeys and then perched for about one minute on a dead tree two meters from our balcony.

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* – 2-10 daily along the Shire River in LIW
Hadada Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash* – between 2 and 15 daily along the Shire River in LIW, also heard and once seen in LIL
White-faced Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* – two groups of about 10 were seen along the Shire River on Nov. 17 and 18
Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* – fairly common (few pairs daily) in LIW
Spur-winged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis* – common along the Shire River in LIW with up to 100 birds
Yellow-billed Duck *Anas undulate* – a pair was seen every day at the dam in front of Chelinda Camp.
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* – one near LIL, three sightings in NYI including a roost at sunset with at least seven birds, one near DZA
Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* – regular but not frequent sightings en route (about 5-6 daily), small numbers (<5) also seen in LNS, LIL, NKH, MKZ, NYI, LIW, and DZA
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* – one was seen over the Shire River on Nov. 17 and 18
African Fish-Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* – about 3-4 in NKH, about 2-3 were always present in SAT around the water reservoirs on the estate, common in LIW (>10 daily)

Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis* – two were seen in the area around Mvuu Lodge
Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus* – rather distant views of one in NKH
Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* – a juvenile and one adult birds in LIW
Brown Snake-Eagle *Circaetus cinereus* – one in flight in DZA
Western Banded Snake-Eagle *Circaetus cinerascens* – a perched adult bird was seen well in NKH; another adult was seen in LIW along the river (perched and in flight).
African Marsh-Harrier *Circus ranivorus* – an adult and juvenile in LUW
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* – three on the Chelinda Bridge loop on Nov. 7 and one on the northern loop road in NYI
African Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides typus* - a juvenile and adult at SAT, an adult in LIW
Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabor* – one in LUW
African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro* – excellent views of one bird flight just outside Kuchawe Inn in ZOM
Ovambo Sparrowhawk *Accipiter ovampensis* – an accipiter in DZA was very probably this species but views were too short
Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk *Accipiter rufiventris* – excellent views of 1 or 2 birds at LUW, another one was seen in NYI at Chelinda Camp
Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus* – one along the M1 between LUW and NYI, one in DZA
Steppe (Common) Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus* – one on 4 Nov. en route to LUW, about 2-3 in LUW, at least three in MUL, at least two in SAT.
Mountain/Forest Buzzard *Buteo oreophilus* – one in NYI, one in DZA. Both sightings may actually be Steppe Buzzards. The one in NYI was identified as a forest buzzard by the guide, but the Dowsett’s Nyika Bird Checklist states that forest/mountain buzzard only occurs in the eastern escarpment with approximately six pairs, but the distance between Chelinda and the escarpment is not that far from a bird’s perspective. The photo below shows the bird seen in Dzalanyama. I am too unfamiliar with mountain/forest Buzzard to say anything conclusive. Any comments (olpa {at} onsneteindhoven.nl) on ID would be very welcome.

African Hawk-Eagle *Aquila spilogaster* – an immature bird seen at close range in MUL, an immature bird was seen in LIW near the Chinguni Hills entrance; two distant largish raptors in LUW with blackish/dark grey and two obvious white panels on the primaries and "dirty white underside" must have been two adult-plumaged birds of this species;

Augur Buzzard *Buteo augur* – an immature bird between LUW and NYI, four sightings in NYI including a dark morph bird
European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* – excellent views of one in NKH, another one seen very well in MUL
Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* – one flew low over the lodge in NKH

Mountain or Steppe Buzzard??
they were frolicking along the forest edge and seen quite well but unfortunately I did not take the scope on that walk.

Wahlberg’s Eagle *Hieraaetus wahlbergi* – three sightings in NKH, three sightings in DZA

Long-crested Eagle *Lophaetus occipitalis* - one seen very well in LUW, another one seen high in the sky in DZA

Crowned Hawk-Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus* – one in flight in NYI, superb views of a nesting bird (on the nest and near the nest) in a dambo in DZA. We also managed to see the two chicks in the nest for a minute or so. The nest was very exposed in a dead tree; the area was clearly often visited by people that came to log trees in the dambo.

Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* – an immature bird was seen in NKH, another immature bird was seen in LIW-RHI

Rock Kestrel *Falco rupicolus* – one near Lilongwe International airport (seen without bins from the car but pretty sure it was this one, although Lesser Kestrel is another option)

Dickinson’s Kestrel *Falco dickinsoni* – one in LNS attacked a yellow-billed kite, in LIW the species was most easily seen in the palms south of Mvuu Camp (easiest on a game drive, but the birds were also seen from the camp)

Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera* – one chasing waxbills at MKZ, another one was seen hunting over the floodplains along the Shire River in LIW on Nov 16
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* – one seen well in NYI on the northern loop on Nov. 8 and one seen on a morning walk in LIW on Nov. 19.

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris* – fairly common to common, seen in NKH, LIW, Coqui Francolin *Francolinus coqui* – a male was seen on Nov. 21 and 22, may have been the same bird but not sure

Hildebrandt’s Francolin *Francolinus hildebrandti* – in NYI we flushed a pair of which the female was seen well in flight. In LIW a male was seen well on a morning walk on Nov. 17 and a pair was seen on an afternoon walk on Nov. 19. In LNS I got glimpses of a francolin that may have been this species too.

Red-necked Francolin *Francolinus afer* – a pair was seen at SAT on Nov. 13 and 16, several coveys of 4-5 birds were seen in LIW (one of them on the edge of the camp site in Mvuu).

Red-winged Francolin *Francolinus levaillantii* – one pair on the Chelinda Bridge loop, three near Chowo Forest in the morning another three on the northern loop on Nov. 8.

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**Red-winged Francolin**

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* – two in flight on Nov. 6 and two seen well on the ground on Nov. 8 in NYI

Stanley (Denham’s) Bustard *Neotis denhami* – only one in NYI on the stretch of road that is right on the Zambian border slightly south of Chowo Forest

[Red-chested Flufftail *Sarothrura rufa* – we flushed a flufftail in a dambo in DZA, which was probably this species]

Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra* – about 5-10 daily on boat trips on the Shire River in LIW

Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculatus* – we saw the last surviving bird on the Nyika plateau on the Chelinda Bridge Loop. The birds have been poached to extinction in Nyika. Another sad conservation story.

Water Thick-knee *Burhinus vermiculatus* – heard in NKH, about 4-6 daily in LIW

Blacksmith Plover *Vanellus armatus* – about 5-15 daily in LIW along the Shire River.
Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus spinosus* – about 10-20 daily in LIW along the Shire River
Wattled Lapwing *Vanellus senegallus* – about 10-20 daily in LIW along the Shire River, a pair in a dambo in DZA on Nov. 21

![Wattled Lapwing protecting his/her nest](image)

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* – about 7-8 on the sandbank with the skimmers in LIW
Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricolor* – about 3-4 in NKH, about 5-6 in LIW on the sandbanks with the skimmers
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* – two in LIW on Nov. 17
African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus* – two in SAT, common in LIW
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* - common in NKH and LIW
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* – a few in NKH, 5-10 daily in LIW
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* – 2-3 in NKH, 5-15 daily in LIW
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* – 5-10 daily in LIW
Little Stint *Calidris minuta* – one group of about ten birds only in LIW
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* – at least five along the Shire River in LIW
Gray-hooded Gull *Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus* – a few at MKZ, common in LIW with up to 200 seen flying along the Shire River to their roosts downstream
African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris* – about 80-90 along the Shire River in LIW
Rameron Pigeon *Columba arquatrix* – common in NYI, usually seen in flight, but a few seen perched. Also seen in SAT feeding on fruits.
Dusky Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia lugens* – during our stay they weren’t very easy to see around Chelinda Camp but several individuals and groups were seen well during game drives.
Mourning Dove *Streptopelia decipiens* – did not pay much attention to this species, only a few sightings (LIW, NKH, LIW and SAT)
Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* – fairly common throughout the tour
Cape Turtle (aka Ring-necked) Dove *Streptopelia capicola* – very common in LIW, and common in many other places (MUL, SAT, NKH, etc.)
Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* – did not pay much attention to this species, three sightings.
Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove *Turtur chalcospilos* – in most places common to very common, seen in LUW, NYI, DZA, MUL, and LIW among others
Blue-spotted Wood-Dove *Turtur afer* – one seen well in LUW, also a few seen in SAT, one seen well in the botanical garden in ZOM, one in MUL
Tambourine Dove *Turtur tympanistris* – one in LNS, about 3-4 in ZOM, and two in SAT
Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* – one in LIW on Nov. 19 and a probable one just a few kilometers outside the gate at NYI
African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus* – a few in LUW, two sightings in NYI, about 25 in MKZ roosting in trees near the lodge, very good views of birds along the river and feeding in fig trees in the lodge grounds in NKH
Livingstone’s Turaco *Tauraco livignstonii* – common in ZOM and SAT/Thyolo Mountain
Schalow’s Turaco *Tauraco schalowi* – common in LUW (several seen very well there); regularly heard in NYI, but the birds seemed rather shy and proved difficult to see well there; regularly heard in DZA but also here birds seemed rather shy although a few were seen well in the area around the lodge
Purple-crested Turaco *Tauraco porphyreolophus* – two seen well on a minor road between Vwaza and Nyika, quite common in LIW (and the surrounding area) with several seen very well
Gray Go-away-bird *Corythaixoides concolor* – small numbers (2-5 daily) in LIW
[African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus* – heard only]
African Cuckoo *Cuculus gularis* – one in a forest reserve a few hours north of LUW
Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* – one sighting in DZA was definitely this species
[African or Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus gularis or canorus* – a second sighting in DZA and two brief sightings in LIW were one of these two species]
Klaas’s Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* – one on a morning walk in LIW, a pair was seen very well at DZA
[African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus* – heard only at SAT]
Dideric Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* – two sightings in DZA
Burchell’s Coucal *Centropus superciliosus* – one seen very well in NKH, one was seen near chalet 7 in Mvuu Lodge
[Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis* – heard in LUW]
[African Scops-Owl *Otus senegalensis* – heard a few times in LIW]
African Wood-Owl *Strix woodfordii* – superb view of a pair and two chicks at a stake-out in LIW

Spotted Eagle Owl *Bubo africanus* – one and three were seen on the night drives on Nov. 6 and 7 in NYI, respectively. One on the night drive on Nov. 17 in LIW.
Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus* – heard at night in LUW, one on the night drive on Nov. 6 in NYI, one and three, respectively, on the night drives on Nov. 16 and 18 in LIW. One found on a daytime roost in LIW on Nov. 19.

Pel's Fishing-Owl *Scotopelia peli* – one was twice seen briefly perched in a roosting tree before it flew off on Nov. 17. Another one was seen the next day on a morning boat ride. The bird was flushed from the ground or a low-hanging branch on the riverbank along the Shire River and then flew into a fig tree allowing prolonged and unobstructed views for at least 15 min when we decided to leave the bird in peace.

African Barred Owlet *Glaucidium capense* – one seen well on a daytime roost in a dambo in DZA, a pair was called in after dark at the lodge in NKH but we didn’t see much more than vague shadows in the sky.

Marsh Owl *Asio capensis* – one on the night drive on the northern loop in NYI on Nov. 8.

Fiery-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus pectoralis* – one seen very on a daytime roost in DZA.

Ruwenzori/Montane/Usambara Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruwenzorii (guttifer)* – 0, 1, 3, and 8, respectively, on the four nights in NYI.

Square-tailed (aka Mozambique/Gabon) Nightjar *Caprimulgus fossii* – only a few were seen on the first three nights in LIW, but at least eight were seen after a thunderstorm (the birds were also very vocal that evening, cool sound); one seen well when flushed from a daytime roost in DZA.

**Mozambique Nightjar**

Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myoptilus* – a few in NYI and MUL.

Common Swift *Apus apus* – small groups in LIW (as far I could see these were all this species and not African Swift *Apus barbatus*).

Little Swift *Apus affinis* – a few sightings near bridges on the road between Chinteche and Salima along Lake Malawi.

White-rumped Swift *Apus caffer* – common to very common throughout.

African Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus parvus* – seen on most days in small numbers (5-20) including in LIJW, MKZ, MUL, LIW and NKH.

Speckled Mousebird *Colius striatus* - not that many sightings, a small group in the lower part of NYI, a few in LUW, three sightings of 2-3 birds in SAT.

Red-faced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus* – only two in LIW.
Narina Trogon Apaloderma narina – heard only in NYI and SAT
Bar-tailed Trogon Apaloderma vittatum – seen very well in Zovo-Chipolo and Chowo Forest, twice groups of up to 4-5 birds together were seen

Half-collared Kingfisher Alcedo semitorquata – twice in the ZOM area a bird was seen in flight that was probably this species, but not well enough to tick
Malachite Kingfisher Corythornis cristatus – one sighting in NKH, common in LIW

African Pygmy-Kingfisher Ispidina picta – one seen very well perched on the Miombo Trail in NKH, one flushed and seen in flight in the MKZ area

Gray-headed Kingfisher Halcyon leucocephala – three sightings (possibly all of the same bird) in NKH, one in LIW

Woodland Kingfisher Halcyon senegalensis – fairly common in LIW, usually 2-3 birds present in both Mvuu Camp and Lodge.

Brown-hooded Kingfisher Halcyon albiventris – two at MKZ, fairly common in NKH, one on the afternoon walk in SAT on Nov. 14, single animals in LIW on Nov. 17 and 19,

Striped Kingfisher Halcyon chelicuti – one in LIW-RHI

Giant Kingfisher Megaceryle maximus – at least three in NKH, many excellent sightings in LIW

Pied Kingfisher Ceryle rudis – very common in LIW and NKH, also seen at MKZ

Little Bee-eater Merops pusillus – about 6-10 in the lower part of NYI near the gate, small numbers (3-5) seen every day in the higher parts of NYI, common in NKH, LIW and DZA

[Swallow-tailed Bee-eater Merops hirundineus- Not seen, we looked for them at two known sites in LIW but the birds had already moved on]

Böhm’s Bee-eater Merops boehmi – two seen well in NKH, common in LIW including in Mvuu Camp and Lodge

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater Merops persicus – a group of at least three was seen perched along the Shire River on Nov. 18

European Bee-eater Merops apiaster – fairly common, usually small groups of 2-10 birds, a few on a lunch stop between LIL and LUW, also seen in NKH, MUL, SAT, LIW and DZA.

European Roller Coracias garrulus – one in LIW
Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudatus* - fairly common roadside birds in LIL and along the main roads M1 and M2. Fairly common in LIW
Racket-tailed Roller *Coracias spatulatus* – one seen well and photographed on a minor road between Vwaza and Nyika

![Racket-tailed Roller](image)

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus* - one in NKH, one in forest just outside LIW, one on the afternoon walk in SAT on Nov. 13, three sightings around Mvuu Lodge/Camp and two in LIW-RHI and one much further north in LIW, one in DZA
African Hoopoe *Upupa africana* – one in LIW-RHI, one LIL
Green Woodhoopoe *Phoeniculus purpureus* – heard only in NKH, several groups seen on the drive from Chinguni Gate to Mvuu Camp
Common Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas* - one in NKH on Nov. 11, two in LIW on the drive from Chinguni Gate to Mvuu
Southern Red-billed Hornbill *Tockus rufirostris* – one near the village Kaduku in the NYI area, very common in LIW-RHI
Crowned Hornbill *Tockus alboterminatus* – one in NKH, two in LIW on Nov. 17
African Gray Hornbill *Tockus nasutus* – only one sighting en route between MKZ and MKZ

Pale-billed Hornbill *Tockus pallidirostris* – one was seen in miombo just outside NYI, one bird in NKH on the waterfall walk

Trumpeter Hornbill *Ceratogymna bucinator* – two birds in a gorge near Rumphi, three sightings of birds in flight in NKH, 1-2 birds seen very well three times in the forest fragment on Thyolo Mountain, three sightings in LIW, three sightings in DZA

Silvery-cheeked Hornbill *Ceratogymna brevis* – wonderful views of (at least) two birds in the forest remnant on Thyolo Mountain.

Southern Ground-Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* – two on a morning walk and a single bird in LIW. Two on the last morning in DZA

Crested Barbet *Trachyphonus vaillantii* – only one in LIW-RHI

White-eared Barbet *Stactolaema leucotis* – two in ZOM near the bridge along the Mulunguzi trail, two in the botanical gardens in ZOM, three in the forest fragment on Thyolo Mountain on the last morning in SAT, one perched in the open on the forest edge near the lodge in SAT

Whyte’s Barbet *Stactolaema whytii* – one seen feeding on a fruit tree close to the riverside cabins in NKH

[Moustached Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus leucomystax* – unfortunately heard only in NYI]

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus* – one in LUW, one in ZOM in the botanical garden, heard but not seen in SAT, three in MUL

Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus chrysoconus* – one on a minor road between Vwaza and Nyika, two in DZA on Nov. 22, two in MUL, one seen very well in the garden of Mafumu lodge on the last morning

Miombo Barbet *Tricholaema frontata* – one seen reasonably well in DZA

Black-collared Barbet *Lybius torquatus* – a few were present around the lodge in NKH with a few more seen on walks, adult and juvenile birds were seen in LIW
Brown-breasted Barbet *Lybius melanopterus* – one seen very briefly perched and then in flight near the boat landing in LIW, two birds were then seen very well further downstream feeding on fig trees

[Sharp-billed Honeyguide *Prodotiscus regulus* – in NKH a couple of rather distant birds were identified as this species by our guide, which may well have been correct. I would have needed a scope to be sure, but the birds flew off quite quickly.]

Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor* – one seen very well at close distance in NKH next to our tent, a probable one in DZA

Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* – a female was seen very well at close range in SAT, a possible one was seen at NKH, a pair was heard in LIW-RHI but they flew off immediately when we got on to them.

Green-backed (aka Little Spotted) Woodpecker *Campethera caillautti* – one female seen well in DZA, I first thought it was Bennett’s, but the bird had no moustachial stripe or other obvious facial markings other than small dots. The breast/belly of the bird was clearly dotted, not streaked.

Reichenow’s (aka Speckle-throated) Woodpecker *Campethera scriptoricauda* – a pair of which the female was seen rather well in NKH. The breast was clearly spotted and the bird definitely had no brown throat patch (so not Bennett’s). The birds seemed to be too robust and large to be green-backed woodpecker, of which I also wasn’t sure whether it occurs in NKH

Golden-tailed Woodpecker *Campethera abingoni* – a pair in the miombo in MUL, three sightings in LIW including one in the grounds of Mvuu Lodge, two sightings in DZA

Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens* – a male seen in NKH, one in a small flock in SAT on the afternoon walk on Nov. 14, two sightings in LIW including one in the grounds of Mvuu Lodge; we saw more woodpeckers during the trip but some were too far away to be determined with certainty.

Stierling’s Woodpecker *Dendropicos stierlingi* – one seen and photographed at DZA

Olive Woodpecker *Dendropicos griseocephalus* – only one seen in NYI

Lilian’s Lovebird *Agapornis lilianae* – about 10 sightings in LIW, mostly small groups of 4-8 birds. Usually in flight, but 3 sightings of birds perched.

Brown-headed Parrot *Poicephalus cryptoxanthus* – a single bird was seen perched briefly on a morning walk in LIW. Four were seen in flight near Mvuu Camp.

African Broadbill *Smithornis capensis* – a male seen in Nkwadzi Forest near Nkhata Bay.

A male and female were seen extremely well in SAT.

Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafra Africana* – about 2-5 daily in NYI
Flappet Lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea* – one en route to LUW, one on the access road to DZA
Banded Martin *Riparia cincta* – one in a mixed group with barn and blue swallows in NYI was hunting over the dam at Chelinda Camp
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* – common, large gatherings around MKZ (up to 2000), large groups were seen migrating south along Lake Malawi on our way south to Zomba
Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* – very common, seen every day
Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* – a dozen or so daily in NYI, the birds would often hunt over the dam at Chelinda Camp in the afternoon

![Blue Swallow](image1)

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* – a few seen on a lunch stop between LIL and LUW, small numbers at LUW and the MKZ/Nkhata Bay area, 5-10 daily in NKH
Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica* – a few in LNS, scattered sightings elsewhere including MKZ, NKH and LUW
Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* – only two sightings near Lake Malawi
White-headed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne albiseps* – about 5-6 at LUW, fairly common in NYI, about 7-8 at
Eastern Black Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne pristoptera* – about 5-7 in LUW, fairly common in ZOM and DZA, regular from Nkhata Bay to Salima including MKZ
Gray-rumped Swallow *Pseudhirundo griseopyga* – seen at the international airport in LIL
Mountain Wagtail *Motacilla clara* – common in ZOM, one in DZA along the stream in front of the lodge, a few at SAT
African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba* – common, seen on most days
African (aka Grassland) Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus* – about 4-8 daily in NYI (this is the dark montane form sometimes called Jackson’s pipit), 1-2 daily in SAT
Buffy Pipit *Anthus vaalensis* – one on the edge of recently burned grassland in NYI
Striped Pipit *Anthus lineiventris* – one in DZA
[Anthus sp. – a rather distant smallish striped pipit in DZA may have been Tree Pipit]
Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus* – two in the dambo in DZA
White-breasted Cuckooshrike *Coracina pectoralis* – one opposite our tent in NKH on Nov. 10, one in DZA on Nov. 21
[Gray Cuckooshrike *Coracina caesia* – not seen, this species is now probably extinct on Thyolo Mountain according to the updated checklist at SAT]
Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* – a male in LIW, a female in DZA
[African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus* – heard only at SAT]
[Green-headed Oriole *Oriolus chlorocephalus* – heard only and a brief, non-tickable view on Thyolo Mountain]
African Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus larvatus* – common, seen in LIW, NYI, ZOM, MUL, SAT and LIW
Square-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus ludwigii* – common on Thyolo Mountain and ZOM
Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* – common, seen on most if not all days of the tour
Pied Crow *Corvus albus* – common in cultivated areas and around Chelinda Camp
White-necked Raven *Corvus albicollis* – common around Chelinda Camp in NYI, small groups on the Nyika plateau, two in MUL, one in DZA

Southern Black Tit *Melaniparus niger* – common in LIW, particularly easy to see in Mvuu Camp, but also regular at Mvuu Lodge

Rufous-bellied Tit *Melaniparus rufiventris* – at least two on the Miombo Loop trail in NKH, two on the hike in MUL, three sightings of 1-2 birds in DZA

Spotted Creeper *Salpornis spilonotus* – only seen in DZA: two on Nov. 21 and another two on Nov. 22

Arrow-marked Babbler *Turdoides jardineii* – one in LIW-RHI, two groups in DZA

Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus importunus* – one seen well in LUW, another one seen very well in NKH, a possible one in ZOM

Southern Mountain (aka Black-browed) Greenbul *Arizelocichla fusciceps* – one seen well in LUW, regular sightings in NYI, of which several were seen well

Stripe-cheeked (aka Olive-headed) Greenbul *Arizelocichla milanjensis* (oliveceiceps) – several sightings in ZOM; two birds were seen really well. Also seen on Thyolo Mountain/SAT. Quite attractive as far as greenbuls go.

Yellow-bellied Greenbul *Chlorocichla flaviventris* – regular sightings in SAT around the lodge, 1-4 daily in LIW

Little Greenbul *Eurillas virens* – several sightings in ZOM and SAT/Thyolo Mountain

Terrestrial Brownbul *Phyllastrephus terrestris* – a small group seen well at Mvuu Lodge

Placid (aka Cabanis’s) Greenbul *Phyllastrephus placidus/cabanisi* – one was seen very well in good light in SAT at the forest edge, quite common in ZOM but often difficult to get decent views, another two seen lower down in the botanical gardens in ZOM (and a possible sighting at MKZ, light too poor), plus numerous greenbuls that remained unseen or were seen poorly. I couldn’t distinguish between Placid Greenbul and Grey-olive Greenbul (*Phyllastrephus cerviventris*), which I also saw mentioned in reports. The IUCN maps show that both occur in Malawi. Confusingly playing the calls of both species would often attract/provoke a reaction from the same birds, so I couldn’t tell them apart and I have lumped all sightings together here.

Yellow-streaked Greenbul *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus* – fairly common in the forest patch on Thyolo Mountain

Sharpe’s Greenbul *Phyllastrephus alfredi* – one seen very well in NYI

Dark-capped (aka Common) Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* – common to abundant in cultivated areas and cities, fairly common to common in nature reserves, seen on all days of the tour

Groundscraper Thrush *Psophocichla litsitsirupa* – one in DZA near the lodge

Kuritchane Thrush *Turdus libonyana* – fairly common, seen in LNS, LUW, MKZ, DZA, LIW, MUL and NYI

Eastern Bearded Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas quadrirhigata* – one seen at close range in MKZ, two in MUL, two feeding in front of our tent in Mvuu Camp, one during a walk near Mvuu Lodge on Nov. 18, one on an afternoon walk on Nov. 19.

Miombo Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas barbata* – one in DZA

White-browed Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas leucocephys* – one seen and photographed in SAT in the lodge garden

Cape Robin-Chat *Cossypha caffra* – only seen in NYI, where fairly easy to see in the area around Chelinda Camp

White-browed Robin-Chat *Cossypha heuglini* – common, seen in LIL, LNS, LUW, NYI, DZA, NKH, MKZ, and MUL

Collared Palm-Thrush *Cichladusa arquata* – about 4-5 sightings in NKH with two birds regularly seen around the lodge restaurant, very common in LIW including Mvuu Camp and Lodge

White-starred Robin *Pogonochilchla stellate* – one adult and one juvenile seen very well at LUW, 1-4 seen in every forest area visited in NYI, two sightings in ZOM
Thyolo Alethe *Pseudelethe choloensis* – this was pretty much the first bird we saw in ZOM at the trout farm. Strangely the bird was not shy and in an area without any thickets, behaving more like a flycatcher.

![African Broabill](image1.png)  ![Thyolo Alethe](image2.png)

[White-chested Alethe *Pseudelethe fueleborni* – one possible sighting in NYI but no conclusive views (very brief in bad light)]

[East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunning* – not seen, we were probably too late in the forest for this species. Only once a bird seemed to respond briefly to the recording I had, but that was it]

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* – several seen in LUW and NKH, a handful of sightings in LIW, a few in Nkwadzi Forest on Nov. 10

Dark-Capped (aka African) Yellow Warbler *Iduna natalensis* – one seen well in LUW

Mountain Yellow Warbler *Iduna similis* – one seen in the lower part of NYI on Nov. 9

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* – a few sightings in LIW including at Mvuu Lodge; call positively identified by Wilderness guide Nick in LIW

[Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* – heard at LUW]

Cinnamon Bracken-Warbler *Bradypterus cinnamomeus* – one was seen well but only briefly, when it emerged from the dense cover in NYI

[Evergreen Forest Warbler *Bradypterus mariae* – a non-descript largish brown warbler in ZOM was probably this species]

Bar-throated Apalis *Apalis thoracica* – two in Chowo Forest on Nov. 8, at least three in the dambo below Chelinda Camp, at least two in the lower part of NYI, three in Nkwadzi Forest on Nov. 10, also recorded on Thyolo Mountain

Yellow-breasted Apalis *Apalis flavida* – two in the garden at MKZ, fairly common in NKH (at least five sightings), regular sightings (1-3 daily) in LIW

Chapin’s Apalis *Apalis chapini* – poor views of mainly the underside of one bird in NYI

Black-headed Apalis *Apalis melanocephala* – one seen reasonably well in NYI, heard regularly in NYI and ZOM, but I could never get really good views. The “all-yellow” form in Zomba (Yellow-throated Apalis *A. Flavigularis*) was not seen at all.

Brown-headed Apalis *Apalis alticola* – pretty good views of one bird in the lower “acacia part” in NYI

Green-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyuran* – one in SAT near the lodge. The “green back” was clearly seen on this one. Another bird seen seemed to be an intermediate between “green” and “grey”. Two other camaropteras I could not see well enough to bring down to species level.

Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brevicaudata* – one in the forest patch on Thyolo Mountain, one in LIW in the grounds of Mvuu Lodge

Sterling’s (aka Miombo) Wren-Warbler *Calamonastes undosus* – one seen well at close range in DZA, a possible one in MUL

Singing Cisticola *Cisticola cantans* – one seen well on Nov. 7 in NYI
Black-crested Cisticola *Cisticola nigroris* – common on the second and third full day in NYI, strangely only a few seen on the first full day
[Rattling Cisticola *Cisticola chiniana* – rather distant views of a cisticola along the Shire River in LIW may have been this species]
Wailing Cisticola *Cisticola lais* – a possible one in LUW?, one seen well and heard in NYI
Churring Cisticola *Cisticola njombe* – common in NYI, between 5 and 20 seen daily there
Piping Cisticola (aka Neddycky) *Cisticola fulvicapillus* – a plain and nonstreaked cisticola with a rufous cap in DZA was most likely this species. Not sure if Rock-loving/Lazy Cisticola occurs in DZA.
Wing-snapping (aka Ayres') Cisticola *Cisticola ayresii* – one seen well in NYI on Nov. 5
Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava* – a few sightings en route, about 6-7 sightings in SAT, two sightings in DZA, one in MUL, one in DZA
Green-capped Eremomela *Eremomela scotops* – about three in NKH in a mixed flock, two in a small flock on the afternoon walk on Nov. 14 in SAT, only a few in DZA
Yellow-bellied Hyliotah *Hyliotah flavicincta* – one seen well at the gate in NKH
Southern Hyliotah *Hyliotah australis* – one seen briefly at the gate in NKH, at least three birds including a juvenile at DZA
Miombo Rock-Thrush *Monticola angolensis* – one male in poor light in LUW, a nice male in the lower part of NYI, fairly common in DZA with three sightings of males and about 7-8 female-type birds
African Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* – one pair in LUW, very common in NYI, fairly common in ZOM and SAT, also seen in MUL
Boulder Chat *Pinarornis plumosus* – excellent views of two in DZA
Arnott’s (aka White-headed Black) Chat *Myrmecocichla arnotti* – two pairs were seen very well at the gate in NKH, a total of about 6-7 (only one male) were seen in LIW-RHI
Mocking Cliff-Chat *Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris* – one in DZA
Familiar Chat *Cercomela familiaris* – three in MUL
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* – only seen at Addis Ababa Airport
Red-faced Crombec *Sylvietta whyti* - a family group of at least 5 birds was seen in MUL
Long-billed (Cape) Crombec *Sylvietta rufescens* – good views of a single bird in LIW on Nov. 17
Southern Black Flycatcher *Melaenornis pammelaina* – several seen in DZA
Spotted Flycatcher *Musicipa striata* – fairly common, 1-2 seen on about 50% of the days, seen in LUW, NYI, and MUL among other places
Böhm’s Flycatcher *Musicipa boehmi* – one in DZA
African Dusky (aka Dusky-brown) Flycatcher *Musicipa adusta* – fairly common to common, seen on most days including in LIW, NYI, NKH, SAT, ZOM, LIW, and DZA
Ashy (aka Blue-grey) Flycatcher *Musicipa caeruleus* – fairly common, 1-2 seen on about 50% of the days, seen in LIW, NYI, NKH, SAT, ZOM, LIW, and DZA
Gray Tit-Flycatcher (aka Fan-tailed Flycatcher) *Myioparus plumbeus* – seen in LIW, NYI, DZA (quite common there with six sightings, often in small family groups), LIW (once) and the Nkhata Bay area.
White-tailed Blue Flycatcher *Elminia albicauda* - (at least) two at DZA on Nov. 22
White-tailed Crested-Flycatcher *Elminia albonotata* – two sightings in NYI on Nov. 6 and 7 (Zovo-Chipolo Forest), one seen well in ZOM at the trout farm
African Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis* – a male was seen in a mixed flock at the gate in NKH, quite common in DZA
Livingstone’s Flycatcher *Erythrocercus livingstonei* – this one proved to be more difficult than expected, one was seen fairly well seen on a morning walk in LIW on Nov. 17.
Three were seen at Mvuu Lodge from the boardwalk to the boat landing. Although they should be present at Mvuu Camp, I did not see them there.
Black-throated Wattle-eye *Platysteira peltata* – a pair feeding a juvenile was seen at MKZ, a pair was seen at Mvuu Lodge from the boardwalk to the boat landing. A male was
seen on an afternoon walk in a forest fragment near the lodge in SAT. Another male was seen in the forest remnant on Thyolo Mountain. A male was seen in a dambo in DZA.

Cape (aka Malawi) Batis *Batis capensis dimorpha* – excellent views of a pair at LUW, about 2-3 seen daily in NYI including in Zovo-Chipolo and Chowo Forest

Chinspot Batis *Batis molitor* – the most common batis on this trip, seen on most days of the tour including LUW, NYI, LIL, LIW, NKH and DZA

Pale Batis *Batis soror* – a pair positively identified in MUL, quite tricky since we also encountered juvenile chinspot batises that look rather similar

White Helmetshrike *Prionops plumatus* – a group of about 8 at the gate in NKH, quite common in DZA with at least four groups seen

Retz’s Helmetshrike *Prionops retzii* – three small groups in NKH on Nov. 11, a nice group of about 8-9 birds was seen on the hike in MUL

Brubru *Nilaus afer* – two in NKH and another two in a forest patch near Chawani Bungalow in SAT

Black-backed Puffback *Dryoscopus cubla* – common, seen at all major sites visited

[Marsh Tchagra *Tchagra minutus* – heard only in LUW]

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus* – one positively identified in NYI in the lower parts

Brown-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra australis* – this seemed to be the common tchagra in Malawi, seen in the NYI area, NKH, SAT, and LIW

Tropical Boubou *Laniarius aethiopicus* – commonly heard and seen on many occasions

Fueelleborn’s Boubou *Laniarius fueelleborni* – in contrast to many uncooperative forest birds in NYI we had numerous good sightings of this bird including one in Zovo-Chipolo on Nov. 7, two in Chowo Forest, one on the northern circuit on Nov. 8

Orange-breasted Bushshrike *Telophorus sulfureopectus* – one seen well in LNS on Nov. 3, one in NKH on Nov. 11, one bird was seen well in Mvuu Lodge near the restaurant. A few more sightings of birds on game drives/walks in LIW.

**Orange-breasted Bush-shrike**  
**Boehm’s Bee-eater**

Black-fronted Bushshrike *Telophorus nigrifrons* – superb views of two birds in Chowo Forest in NYI, a male was seen in the forest remnant on Thyolo Mountain, which was encouraging because this species had not been seen for a couple of years

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* – two sightings of a single bird in LIW

Common Fiscal *Lanius collaris* – fairly common, regularly seen en route, 3-7 daily in NYI

Sousa’s Shrike *Lanius souzae* – three sightings in DZA, twice a single bird and once a pair

Greater Blue-eared Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis chalybaeus* – very common in LIW
Miombo Blue-eared Glossy Starling Lamprotornis elisabeth – one in miombo just outside NYI, three sightings of 1-2 birds in NKH
Meves’s Glossy Starling Lamprotornis mevesii – very common in LIW
Violet-backed Starling Cinnyricinclus leucogaster – common in LUW, NKH, MUL, LIW and DZA, but seen at all sites visited
Slender-billed Starling Onychognathus tenuirostris – one in flight between two forest fragments in NYI on Nov. 8
Waller’s Starling Onychognathus walleri – brief and poor views in NYI
[White-winged Babbling Starling Neocichla gutturalis – not seen, we looked for this species on a minor road that forms a shortcut between Vwaza and Nyika, but did not find the bird. Our guide in LIW who was born in this area told me that we should have continued further down this road to see the species]
Red-billed Oxpecker Buphagus erythrorhynchus – one in LIW on Nov. 18
Yellow-billed Oxpecker Buphagus africanus – one on a roan on Nov. 6 in NYI
Anchieta’s Sunbird Anthreptes anchietae – one in DZA

Collared Sunbird Hedydipna collaris – fairly common in the south, seen in the botanical gardens in ZOM, MUL, and LIW
Green-headed Sunbird Cyanomitra verticalis – a large female-type bird in LUW. This species does not seem to be often reported in Malawi trip reports so initially I thought it was one of the more commonly seen species in a transitional plumage, such as malachite sunbird, bronze sunbird, olive sunbird, etc. The belly of the bird was clearly uniform grey, which also ruled out the significantly smaller yellow-bellied sunbird species (Variable, Collared, etc.). The bird was eventually seen at close range in good light for at least three minutes and had a crisp female-type plumage exactly as depicted in the field guides (glossy green head, olive green wings and back, uniform grey belly). The IUCN maps suggest that Luwawa is right on the edge of where the species should occur.
Eastern Olive Sunbird Cyanomitra olivacea – fairly common in ZOM around Kuchawe Inn/Mulunguzi Trail, also seen in DZA
Amethyst Sunbird Chalcomitra amethystine – at least one pair in LUW, one pair in MKZ, regular sightings in NKH including a pair around the lodge, a male was seen in MUL, a few sightings in LIW, 3-4 pairs seen in DZA including one around the lodge, one pair in SAT
Scarlet-chested Sunbird Chalcomitra senegalensis – two pairs were seen in NKH around the lodge, a pair and a male alone were seen in MUL, a pair in LIW on Nov. 18, several sightings of males and pairs in DZA, a pair was seen between DZA and LIL and a pair at Mafumu Lodge in LIL
Bronze Sunbird Nectarinia kilimensis – one pair at LUW and a pair in NYI on Nov. 6.
Malachite Sunbird *Nectarinia famosa* – one male at NYI, a female in a forest patch near Chawani Bungalow in SAT and another female in the garden area of the lodge in SAT

Miombo Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris manoenisis* - one male at DZA

Montane (aka Ludwig's) Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris ludovicensis* – a male seen well in Zovo Chipolo on Nov. 7 in NYI, a pair seen well on Nov. 8

Forest (aka Eastern) Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris mediacris* – several seen well in LIW, NYI and ZOM

Purple-banded Sunbird *Cinnyris bifasciatus* - a pair at MKZ

White-bellied Sunbird *Cinnyris talatala* – a pair was seen well next to our tent in NKH on Nov. 11, a male at Mvuu Camp on Nov. 16, a pair in LIW on Nov. 19.

Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus* – fairly common, seen in LNS, LUW, NKH and SAT

African Yellow White-eye *Zosterops senegalensis* – fairly common but usually low numbers (2-5), seen in LIW, NYI, SAT/Thyolo, ZOM, LIL, DZA, LIW

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* – seen in larger cities (Kasungu,) en route

Northern Gray-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* – several in LIL, LIW and en route from LIL to NYI, regular sightings in NKH

Southern Gray-headed Sparrow *Passer diffuses* – fairly common in the LIW and the surrounding area, the sparrows seen in SAT should also be this species if the Birdlife maps are correct (http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=8383)

Yellow-throated Petronia *Petronia supercilialis*– very common in NKH and DZA

White-browed Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser mahali* – common in LIW and abundant in LIW-RHI

Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubriceps* – a beautiful male during a walking safari in LIW, a pair was seen well in DZA

Bertram’s Weaver *Ploceus bertrandii* – one male seen well in LUW

Baglafecht Weaver *Ploceus baglafecht* – about 5-6 around the dam at Chelinda Camp and two at dam 2 in NYI

Spectacled Weaver *Ploceus ocularis* – fairly common in LIW and ZOM, a few seen in SAT and LIW

African Golden Weaver *Ploceus subaureus* – good views of (at least) two in MKZ, fairly common in NKH with several birds seen very well, also a pair seen well in SAT

Holub's Golden Weaver *Ploceus xanthops* – small numbers (2-4) in LIW and DZA

Southern Brown-throated Weaver *Ploceus xanthopterus* – quite common in LIW, common at Mvuu Camp and quite common throughout in LIW, small numbers in NKH

Lesser Masked Weaver *Ploceus intermedius* – seen at NKH and LIW

Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* – seen at DZA, MKZ and SAT

Village (aka Spotted-backed) Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus* – several sightings en route, also seen in the MKZ area, SAT, LNS and LIW

Forest (aka Dark-backed) Weaver *Ploceus bicolor* – easier than expected, two in the garden of Kuchawe Inn in ZOM, fairly common in the forest patch on Thyolo Mountain, but in SAT also seen in forest patches near the lodge

[Olive-headed Weaver *Ploceus olivaceiceps* – two in DZA seemed to be this species but they were too far away to be sure]

Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea* – about 7-8 sightings en route, also seen in NKH, LIW and DZA

Southern Red Bishop *Euplectes orix* – a group in non-breeding plumage near the Chinguni Hills gate in LIW was identified as this species by our guide

Yellow Bishop *Euplectes capensis* – seen in LIW, NYI, and SAT (all in non-breeding plumage)

White-winged Widowbird *Euplectes albonotatus* – an early-breeding plumage male in a larger group with nondescript female/immature birds was seen well allowing correct identification
Yellow-mantled Widowbird *Euplectes macrourus* – seen in LUW, DZA and the NYI area, most in non-breeding plumage and some in the early stages of conversion to breeding plumage
Red-collared Widowbird *Euplectes ardens* – seen in LUW and DZA, most in non-breeding plumage and some in the early stages of conversion to breeding plumage
Montane Marsh (aka Buff-shouldered) Widowbird *Euplectes psammomocromius* – about 5 males in breeding plumage were seen. The dambos around dam 1 and 2 in NYI were good places to see this species.
Grosbeak Weaver *Amblyospiza albilfrons* – about 30 in SAT
Yellow-bellied Waxbill *Coccopygia quartinia* – one seen very well at LUW, a few sightings en route, one in a group with common waxbills near Chelinda Camp, two in NYI on the morning excursion on Nov. 8, a few near MKZ, also seen in NKH, two on the walk in MUL.
Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* – common at LUW (>50), SAT and NYI (easy to see around Chelinda Camp)
Blue Waxbill (aka Blue-breasted Cordonbleu) *Uraeginthus angolensis* – common, seen on almost every day of the tour
[Green-backed Twinspot *Mandingoa nitidula* – not seen, we tried several good spots for them in LIW, but no luck. Basically any dense bushes, tangles and undergrowth in and around Mvuu Camp and Lodge can be good for this species]
Red-throated (Peters's) Twinspot *Hypargos niveoguttatus* – two seen very well in LNS, excellent views of a male at LUW, great views of a male out in the open in the botanical gardens in ZOM, up to four seen feeding on the track that leads up to the forest in Thyolo Mountain plus another male seen not far from the lodge

Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba* – three sightings in LUW, excellent views of a pair on a minor road between Vwaza and Nyika, regular sightings in NKH
Orange-winged Pytilia *Pytilia afric* - one seen quite well in NKH
Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala* – seemed to be the most common firefinch, seen at MKZ, NKH, SAT, LUW, LIW, ZOM, DZA and MUL
African Firefinch *Lagonosticta rubrice* – small groups at LUW, NYI and DZA
Jameson's Firefinch *Lagonosticta rhodopareia* – a few in LUW, several seen very well at the dambo and around the lodge in DZA
Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullatus* - common at LUW, SAT, MUL, DZA and surroundings; seen on most days of the tour
Black-and-white Mannikin *Spermestes bicolor* – only seen once in NKH
Magpie (aka Red-backed) Mannikin *Spermestes fringilloides* - common at SAT, also seen in MUL and ZOM
Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* – a few small groups en route, several groups at SAT with most birds in full or developing breeding plumage
Yellow-fronted Canary *Crithagra mozambicus* – fairly common, regular sightings at LUW, NKH, SAT, MUL, and NYI
Southern Citril *Serinus hypostictus* – seen at LUW, ZOM and SAT
Brimstone Canary *Serinus sulphuratus* – one seen very well in a group of three in NYI on Nov. 7, several more were seen around Chelinda Camp, also seen in LUW
Black-eared Seedeater *Serinus mennelli* – a few sightings in DZA
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi* – one on a minor road between Vwaza and NYI
Golden-breasted Bunting *Emberiza flaviventris* – two single birds in MUL and a few in DZA
Cabanis’s Bunting *Emberiza cabanisi* – about 3-4 daily in DZA

*Weird “psychedelic” photo of the sky in LIW*
OTHER WILDLIFE

Lots of geckos, skinks, agamas, lizards, etc. were seen (in Mulanje, Liwonde and Nyika in particular) but I never had enough time to photograph or identify them. The forests (Nyika, Thyolo, Zomba, Nkhata Bay and to a lesser extent Dzalanyama) had many spectacular butterflies. The Gaudy Commodore on the photo on the next page was one of the few butterflies that allowed me to take some pictures. Apart from spectacular flowers, Nyika also had some amazing insects such as the electric-green cuckoo wasps, which are giant but harmless and non-aggressive.

Black Mamba *Dendroaspis polylepis* – one slithered into the bar in Mvuu Lodge while the barman was working there, he managed to escape and eventually the staff managed to kill the snake. Unsurprisingly, this was the event of the week for the staff. According to the manager black mambas are rarely seen in the park.

“Brown Mountain Grass Snake” – one in Nyika, this is how our guide Watson called it but this common name does not seem to exist. A rather unspectacular mid-sized brownish snake and according to Watson a non-poisonous snake.

Serrated Hinged Terrapin *Pelusios sinuatus* – 1-2 daily in LIW

Nile Crocodile *Crocodylus niloticus* – common in LIW

Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* – one in MKZ, about four seen in LIW

Tropical House Gecko *Hemidactylus mabouia* – common

Speckle-lipped Mabuya Skink *Trachylepis maculilabris* – one at SAT

Meller’s Chameleon (aka Giant One-horned Chameleon) *Trioceros melleri* – two at SAT
FLORA

I am practically analphabetic when it comes to flora but I did appreciate the beauty and variety of flowers, trees, etc. on a general aesthetic level, and this was not even the best time of the year (peak season is January-March). A random collection of flowers is shown below. A useful website for botanists is www.malawiflora.com.