

BATIS BIRDING SAFARIS - ANGOLA RECCE TRIP OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2011

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Three of the Batis Birding team plus two enthusiastic birders from Namibia visited Angola between the 27 October and 11 November 2011 to access some new potential birding sites primarily in the north where we were interested in searching for the recently recorded Oliveback. Unfortunately we were not able to record this species while in Angola, but we did manage to record several other good West African species including Hartlaub's Duck flying over the forest to the Southwest of Uige! This visit to Angola was also to check on recent road work developments as these could make access to the area a lot easier and quicker. While in the Uige area the annual rains arrived and we were forced to start an early return and unfortunately could not get into the Kumbira forest area as the rains had set in pretty solidly, thus denying us access and therefore species such as Gabela Bush-shrike, Pulitzer's Longbill and Gabela Akalat were missed. Except for the Gabela specials, we managed to see most of the endemics and also recorded the first breeding record for Swierstra's Francolin! The road conditions throughout the country (excluding the extreme south) have improved greatly, making it possible to access areas previously very difficult to get to. Our trip took us from the Calueque (southern border) all the way up to Uige (near the DRC border). A lot of West African species were seen, along with most of the Namibian near endemics. Highlights of the trip were, Swierstra's Francolin, Braun's Bush-shrike, Monteiro's Bush-shrike, Grey-striped Spurfowl, Hartert's Camaroptera, White-fronted Wattle-eye, Gabela Helmet-shrike, Angola Sweet Waxbill, Angola Slaty Flycatcher, Red-crested Turaco, White-bellied Kingfisher, Congo Moor Chat, Angola Cave Chat and the extremely range restricted White-headed Robin-chat. Angola is becoming more accessible by the day.

DAY 1: Calueque -Tundavala

We entered Angola via the Calueque border post in the south near Ruacana at around 08h00. While waiting to do the normal passport formalities we had splendid views of a group of Blue Waxbills, a few Cattle Egrets, Cape Glossy Starlings and African Grey Hornbill. Once in Angola we had Rattling Cisticola next to the road, Lesser Striped, Wire-tailed and Red-breasted swallows White-rumped Swifts and Palm Swifts, Purple Roller, Red-billed Buffalo - Weaver, Wattled Starling, and Marico Sunbird. At the bridge crossing the Kunene River we had Gull-billed Tern fly by, also Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Malachite Kingfisher, Reed Cormorant, Senegal Coucal, Red-eyed Bulbul and Golden-breasted Bunting. The track from Calueque is time consuming (which allowed for good roadside birding) and can become inaccessible once the rains set in. We took the opportunity to use it while it was still dry. A while down the track and there is a distinct change of habitat (Combretum and Baikiaea woodland) which provided the first Red-headed Weaver, Amethyst and White-bellied Sunbirds, Black Cuckoo, Rüppell's Parrot, Damara Red-billed Hornbill, Meve's Longtailed Starling, Chestnut Weaver, White-tailed Shrike, Carp's Black Tit, Arrow-marked and Black-faced Babbler. We eventually met up with the main road to Lubango at Cahama.

From Cahama to Lubango we recorded Acacia Pied Barbet, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Yellow-billed Hornbill, Burchell's Starling, Lilac-breasted Roller, Red-headed Finch, Grey

Kestrel, Bateleur, Long-billed Crombec, Black-throated Canary, African Golden and Black-headed Oriole. We eventually arrived at Lubango and headed up to the Tundavala Plateau to spend the night.

DAY 2: Tundavala

We spent the whole day birding the plateau and found it very disappointing to find that the on-going deforestation was still taking place and particularly the area where we had photographed and caught two Swierstra's Francolin on the previous visit. This area was completely trashed and the birds had moved much further down the valley making them far more difficult to observe, however the good news was that we did record them here with small chicks! The area also provided Rock Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, Augur Buzzard, African Harrier Hawk, Verreaux's Eagle, Striped, Plain-backed and African Pipit, and Western Tinkerbird. We also recorded Perrin's Bush-shrike, Angola Sweet Waxbill, Violet-backed Starling, Wailing Cisticola, Miombo and Short-toed Rock-thrush, Black-faced Canary, Angola Slaty Flycatcher, Black-collared Barbet, Angola Cave Chat, Black Saw-wing, Bradfield's, White-rumped, Little and Alpine swift, Lesser Honeyguide, European Bee-eater, Schalow's Turaco, Black-backed Puffback, White Helmetshrike, Miombo Tit, Grey Apalis, Hartlaub's Babbler, Ludwig's Double-collared, Oustalet's, Bronzy and Variable Sunbirds, Common Stonechat, Rockrunner, Rock and Cape Bunting, Freckled Nightjar and Swierstra's Francolin. On our return journey we spent a further night at Tundavala but did not find any other unusual species.

DAY 3: Tundavala- Camp between Lobito and Sumbe

After an early breakfast we headed for our overnight camp between Lobito and Sumbe with a whole lot of habitat to cover in-between. Near Cacula we saw a single Wahlberg's Eagle, Horus and Little Swifts, Black Saw-wing, European, Wire-tailed, and Lesser-Striped Swallows. En-route from here we also recorded the difficult Anchieta's Barbet (seen in the same area on previous trips), Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Augur Buzzard, Jacobin Cuckoo, Amethyst, Marico and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, Red-billed Firefinch, Bronze Manniken, Blue Waxbill, Black-headed Oriole, Black Cuckooshrike, Little Bee-eater, Violet-backed Starling and Groundscraper Thrush.

From Quilenques to Benguela we found Golden, Red-headed and Village Weavers, Black-backed Puffback, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Böhm's Spinetail, African Palm Swift, Mosque Swallow, Black-collared Barbet, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Red-necked Spurfowl, Swamp Boubou which have a completely different dialect than the ones further south! Southern Yellow-billed, Damara Red-billed and Crowned Hornbills were seen at intervals, and Neddicky, Black-eyed Bulbul, Grey Go-away-bird, Cape Turtle, Red-eyed and Laughing doves and a pair Jameson's Firefinch.

Benguela to our camp we observed Black, Little and Intermediate Egrets, African Darter, Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove, White Helmetshrike, Brown Snake-Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite and the first of many Palmnut Vultures.

DAY 4: Camp to Kwanza Lodge

We did some early morning birding before breakfast and then broke up camp. This walk provided us with a nesting pair of Palmnut Vulture, Angola Batis, Brubru Shrike, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Senegal Coucal, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Rockrunner, Green-winged Pytilia, Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Carp's Black Tit, Klaas's Cuckoo and Bubbling Cisticola.

Before Sumbe we recorded Southern White-crowned Shrike, Spotted Flycatcher, African Marsh Harrier, Tawny-flanked Prinia and at the wetland before town we had Greater Flamingo, Goliath Heron, Grey Heron, Peregrine Falcon, Zitting Cisticola, Three-banded Plover, Common Sandpiper, Rufous-tailed Palmthrush, Little Stint, Black-winged Stilt, Little Bee-eater, Common Greenshank, Red-faced Mousebird, Village Weaver, Little and Horus Swifts and Purple-banded Sunbird.

From Rio Longa we saw Bateleur, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Cape Glossy Starling, Striped Kingfisher, Helmeted Guineafowl, Lilac-breasted Roller, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, Rüppell's Parrot, Black-bellied Bustard, European Bee-eater, Red-billed Quelea, Desert Cisticola and Mottled Spinetail.

DAY 5 & 6: Kwanza Lodge to Camp in the remote south east of Kissama Park via Cabo Ledo

In the morning at the Kwanza lodge a Purple-banded Sunbird was busy building her nest. We set off to our next camp spot in the remote south east of Kissama Park to search for the Gabela Helmet Shrike among other sought after species such as the Grey-striped Spurfowl and the enchanting little White-fronted Wattle-eye. Along the way we stopped in at Cabo Ledo. Here we had good views of Angola Swallows and Fernando Po Swifts skimming the surface of the water in the small lagoon. A pair of African Fish Eagles was calling above the cliffs at the edge of the ocean. We also at this site had Caspian, Royal and Common Terns, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Bubbling Cisticola, Cape Gannet, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Acacia Pied Barbet, Red-eyed Dove, Carp's Black Tit, White-browed Coucal, Swamp Boubou, Familiar Chat, Grey Heron, Common Sandpiper, Cape Glossy Starling, Palmnut Vulture, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Blue Waxbill and Namaqua Dove.

Before lunch we started heading east into the park. A stop about 30km from the coast yielded Helmeted Guineafowl, Black-bellied Bustard, Yellow-billed Hornbill, Rufous-naped Lark, Violet Wood-hoopoe, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Lizard Buzzard, Black-headed Oriole, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Black-backed Puffback, Long-billed Crombec, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove everywhere, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, African Hoopoe, Little Bee-eater, Böhm's Spinetail and Brown Snake Eagle.

Before camp we found a lovely pair of Broad-billed Roller which turned out to be quite common over the next two days, White-winged Widow, Red-backed Mousebird, and European Bee-eater.

During the next two days we managed to do very well in this area with the highlights being, a group of Gabela Helmet-Shrikes seen a few times carrying food to their nest, White-fronted Wattle-eyes nest building, Grey-striped Spurfowl (next to camp!), Hartert's Camaroptera, Monteiro's Bush-Shrike being mobbed by a Black Cuckooshrike, Red-crested Turacos mousing their way through the high Baobabs and Black Scimitarbill.

This area was very productive giving us good sightings of Collared, Bannerman's and Purple-banded Sunbird, Perrin's and Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Purple-throated and Petit's Cuckooshrike, Woodland, Pygmy and Grey-headed Kingfisher, Golden-tailed, Cardinal, Bearded and Brown-eared Woodpecker, Pale-olive and Yellow-throated Greenbul, the highly secretive but very vocal Blue Malkoa, Ashy Tit, , African paradise Flycatcher and Black and White Flycatchers, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Crested Guineafowl, Black-necked, Village, Dark-backed and Spectacled Weavers, Red-necked Spurfowl, Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush, Bocage's Akalat, Scaly-throated, Greater and Lesser Honeyguide, White Helmet-shrike, White-browed Robin Chat, Forest Scrub Robin, African Scops and Barred Owl, Red-chested and Jacobin Cuckoo, Swamp Boubou on a nest, Red-faced Mousebird, Angola Batis, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Green Woodhoopoe, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Black-backed Puffback, African Broadbill, Green-winged Pytilia, Bubbling Cisticola, Red-backed Shrike, Tambourine Dove, Little Bittern, White-faced Duck, African Jacana, Intermediate Egret, Grey and Common Waxbill, Pin-tailed Whydah, Pied Kingfisher, African Sand –martin, Squacco and Goliath Heron, Kuricane Thrush, Bateleur, African Fish Eagle, Palmnut Vulture, Hooded Vulture and European Hobby.

DAY 7: Camp In remote south east to Quibaxi/Dembos - wild camp

We didn't waste too much time in the morning and got onto the road early yet again. Our main objective for our next destination was the Braun's Bush-Shrike. On the way to Luanda, crossing the Kwanza River we saw Collared Pratincole, African Darter and Reed Cormorant. After Luanda we had Long-crested Eagle, Viellot's Weaver, African Pied Hornbill, Black Bee-eater and Red-necked Buzzard.

We arrived at our camp and encountered our first rain. In the afternoon we headed into some forest patches and got Red-rumped Tinkerbird, African Goshawk, the enormous Great Blue Turaco, Splendid Glossy Starling, Yellow-throated and Little Greenbul, Olive-bellied Sunbird, Grey-headed Nigrita, White-thighed Hornbill, Pink-footed Puffback, African Harrier Hawk and Shining Blue Kingfisher. On the forest edge we had Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Cattle Egret, Sooty Flycatcher, Helmeted Guineafowl and finally, what we came for, two pairs of the beautiful Braun's Bush-Shrike.

DAY 8 & 9: Quibaxi/Dembos wild camp – wild camp south of Uige

En route to our next camp, which wasn't too far, we birded a few good forest patches. These gave views of Great Blue Turaco, Blue-throated Roller, Yellow-throated Nicator, Superb Sunbird, Blue Malkoa and a host of birds we had encountered previously. Unfortunately we could not find the Oliveback which had been seen by the previous Rockjumper group in the same area.

Once off the main road on the way to our forest camp, in the grasslands we had Black-collared Bulbul, Common Stonechat, Sooty Chat, Orange-cheeked and Common Waxbill, Brown Twinspot, Black-bellied Seedcracker, Red-necked Spurfowl, Red-necked Buzzard, Yellow-backed Widow and Banded Martin.

During the next two days in the forest we did some superb birding with Great Blue and Guinea Turaco, Red-capped Robin Chat, Black-casqued Wattled Hornbill, African Pied and White-thighed Hornbills, Yellow-mantled Weaver, Sooty Flycatcher, Splendid Glossy Starling, Crested Malimbe, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, the almost impossible White-tailed Rufous Thrush, African Wood-Owl, Narina's Trogon, African Emerald and Black Cuckoo, Naked-faced and Bristle-nosed Barbet, Speckled Tinkerbird, White-breasted and Grey-headed Nigrita, Afep and African Green Pigeon, Simple Greenbul, Grey Apalis, Chocolate-backed, Blue-breasted, Pygmy and White-bellied Kingfisher, Green Hylia, White-spotted Flufftail, African Shrike Flycatcher and Rufous-vented Paradise Flycatcher, Bannerman's and Olive Sunbird, Yellow Longbill, Velvet-mantled and Square-tailed Drongo, Black Bee-eater, Yellow-browed Camaroptera, African Piculet, Woodhouse's Antpecker, Black-winged Oriole, Angola Batis and Chestnut Wattle-eye.

DAY 10 & 11: Camp south of Uige – Calandula

We packed up camp early and got on the road again. Our next destination was Calandula, the most reliable area for the extremely range restricted White-headed Robin-Chat. We made a picnic stop just south of Negage in some grassland. Here we saw our only Congo Moor Chat. We also encountered Fawn-breasted Waxbill, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Mosque Swallow, Bronze Manniken, Golden Bishop, and Red-necked Buzzard.

We turned towards Calandula shortly after Camabatela and made several stops at forest patches along the way. In the two days in the Calandula area, consisting of small forest patches and stunted Miombo woodland, we saw Black-chested Snake-Eagle, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Yellow-fronted Canary, Perrin's Bush-Shrike, Broad-billed Roller, Grey-winged Robin Chat, Red-crested Turaco, Red-eyed Dove, African and Black Cuckoo, African Broadbill, Cape Glossy Starling, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Anchieta's and Black-backed Barbet, Square-tailed Drongo, Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Sharp-tailed Starling, Coppery Sunbird, Common Fiscal, Wire-tailed Swallow, African Firefinch, Red-capped Robin Chat, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Anchieta's Tchagra, Meyer's Parrot, African Hoopoe, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Tambourine Dove, Greater Honeyguide, Red-chested Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Kite, Crowned Hornbill, Red-throated Cliff Swallows breeding under the Rio Lucalo bridge, African Marsh Harrier, Whistling Cisticola and our highlight, White-headed Robin Chat.

DAY 12 & 13: Calandula to Ndalantando via Pedra Negras

We departed from our hotel after an early breakfast. A day visit to Pedras Negras (a unique island of big boulders south west of Calandula) was our destination. On our way there along the road we had Fan-tailed Widow, Black-shouldered Kite, Golden Weaver, Lilac-breasted Roller and Pied Crow.

After turning off towards Pedras Negras we had a single Red-headed Lovebird, Violet-backed Sunbird and African Grey Hornbill. At Pedras Negras we had a lovely welcoming show of Red-crested Turacos, a single Ross's Turaco, African Hawk-Eagle, Brown-headed Apalis, Angola Batis, Rufous-vented Paradise Flycatcher, Variable, Scarlet-chested and Bannerman's Sunbird, Anchieta's Tchagra, Square-tailed Drongo, White-winged Black Tit, African Black Swift, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Olive Woodpecker and Bateleur.

We left the boulders after lunch and back tracked to Casuco and got back onto the main road to Ndalantando. We arrived at our camp in the rain and had to wait a bit to commence with the twitching. After an hour or so we got to do some birding in the late afternoon. The forest in and around Ndalantando is under pressure because of logging and human pressures, like most other forests in Africa. There is also a very blatant bush meat trade from this area onwards into the northern areas of Angola.

We were rewarded with superb birding here over the next two days missing very few of our targets. We got views of Gabon Coucal, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Piping, Crowned, African Pied and Black-casqued Wattled Hornbill, Naked-faced, Yellow-billed and Bristle-nosed Barbet, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Green-throated, Olive, Copper and Collared Sunbird, Red-necked Buzzard, Red-tailed Bristlebill, Black and White, Blue Grey, African Shrike and African Paradise Flycatcher, Yellow-crested and Brown-eared Woodpecker, Yellow-browed Camaroptera, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Thick-billed Weaver, Blue-throated Roller, Green Crombec, Great Blue and Red-crested Turaco, Chocolate-backed, Woodland and Pygmy Kingfisher, Blue Malkoa, Black-winged and Black-headed Oriole, Yellow-throated Nicotar, Striped, Levillant's African Emerald, Klaas's, Red-chested, Thick-billed and Diderick's Cuckoo, Splendid Glossy and Chestnut-winged Starling, Black-eyed Bulbul, Little, Plain, Falkenstein's and Slendor Billed Greenbul, Red-eyed Tambourine and Cape Turtle Dove, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, European and Black Bee-eater, Peregrine Falcon, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Brown Twinspot, Palmnut Vulture, Red-capped Robin Chat, African Harrier Hawk, Grey-striped and Red-necked Spurfowl, Red-fronted Parrot, Familiar Chat, Crowned Eagle, Rock Kestrel, Yellow-throated Leaflove, Flappet Lark, Cassin's Hawk Eagle, Black Saw-wing, African Goshawk, Red-backed Mousebird, Pin Tailed Whydah and Common Swift.

DAY 14: Ndalantando - wild camp between Lobito and Sumbe

Today was spent driving south towards Tundavala but camping at our site between Sumbe and Lobito. We birded along the road seeing mainly raptors and some smaller passers-by. Near Dondo we had Western-banded Snake-Eagle, White-winged Widow, and Marabou Stork. After Quibala we saw Martial Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Steppe Buzzard, Brown Snake-Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite, Grey Kestrel and Common Scimitarbill. Around our camp we saw Rockrunner, Cape Penduline Tit, Swamp Boubou, Purple-banded Sunbird, White-browed Scrub Robin and Red-necked Spurfowl.

DAY 15: Wild camp to Tundavala

We left camp before sunrise to buy some time to bird along the way. Between Lobito and Benguela we had Sacred Ibis, Black-winged Stilt, Common Whimbrel, Great White Pelican, African Spoonbill and Squacco Heron.

From Benguela to Chongoroi we saw Sabota Lark, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Verreaux's Eagle, Augur Buzzard, African Hawk-Eagle, White-tailed Shrike, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Yellow-fronted Canary.

The last stretch from Chongoroi to Tundavala gave us sights of Wahlberg's Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Yellow-billed Kite, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Rockrunner, Black-headed and African Golden Oriole, Red-necked Spurfowl, Grey and Pale-billed Hornbill.

At Tundavala we saw Bocage's Akalat, Grey Apalis, Angola Cave Chat, Miombo Rock thrush, Verreaux's Eagle, Rufous-naped Lark, Striped Pipit, Spotted Eagle Owl, Angola Slaty and Spotted Flycatcher, Wing-snapping Cisticola, Pale-billed Firefinch and one of the trip highlights, the first breeding record for Swierstra's Francolin! Unfortunately while trying to get a photograph a local threw a rock into the bush in which they were sheltering and flushed them. The future for this population is very uncertain due to human encroachment and habitat loss.

DAY 16: Tundavala- Calueque border (end of trip)

We had to rush back as we heard that there had been a bit of rain which could make getting out of the Calueque border quite sticky. We saw a lot of previously seen species and adding Cinderella's Waxbill and Lesser-spotted Eagle to the list.

**For photos please go to <http://www.batisbirdingsafaris.com/angola.php>