



**Vulture tagging in
Liuwa Plain NP and
Chisamba**

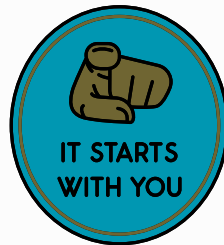
**Vulture movement
patterns in Zambia**

**The Great Kavango-
Zambezi Birding
Route**



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BirdWatch Zambia (BWZ), formerly known as **Zambian Ornithological Society (ZOS)** is a membership-based local environmental Non-governmental Organization (NGO) established in 1969. BWZ is a partner to BirdLife International, the world's largest nature conservation partnership with over 100 national partners around the world. The mission of BWZ is to promote the study, conservation and general interest in birds and their habitats in Zambia. The main activities of BWZ are centred on Zambia's 42 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), based on taking action for species, sites, systems and societies. This means taking necessary action on species, collecting data on sites to influence land use and engaging people to promote the linkage between biodiversity conservation and people's livelihoods through community awareness and environmental education in schools.

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Dear Birders

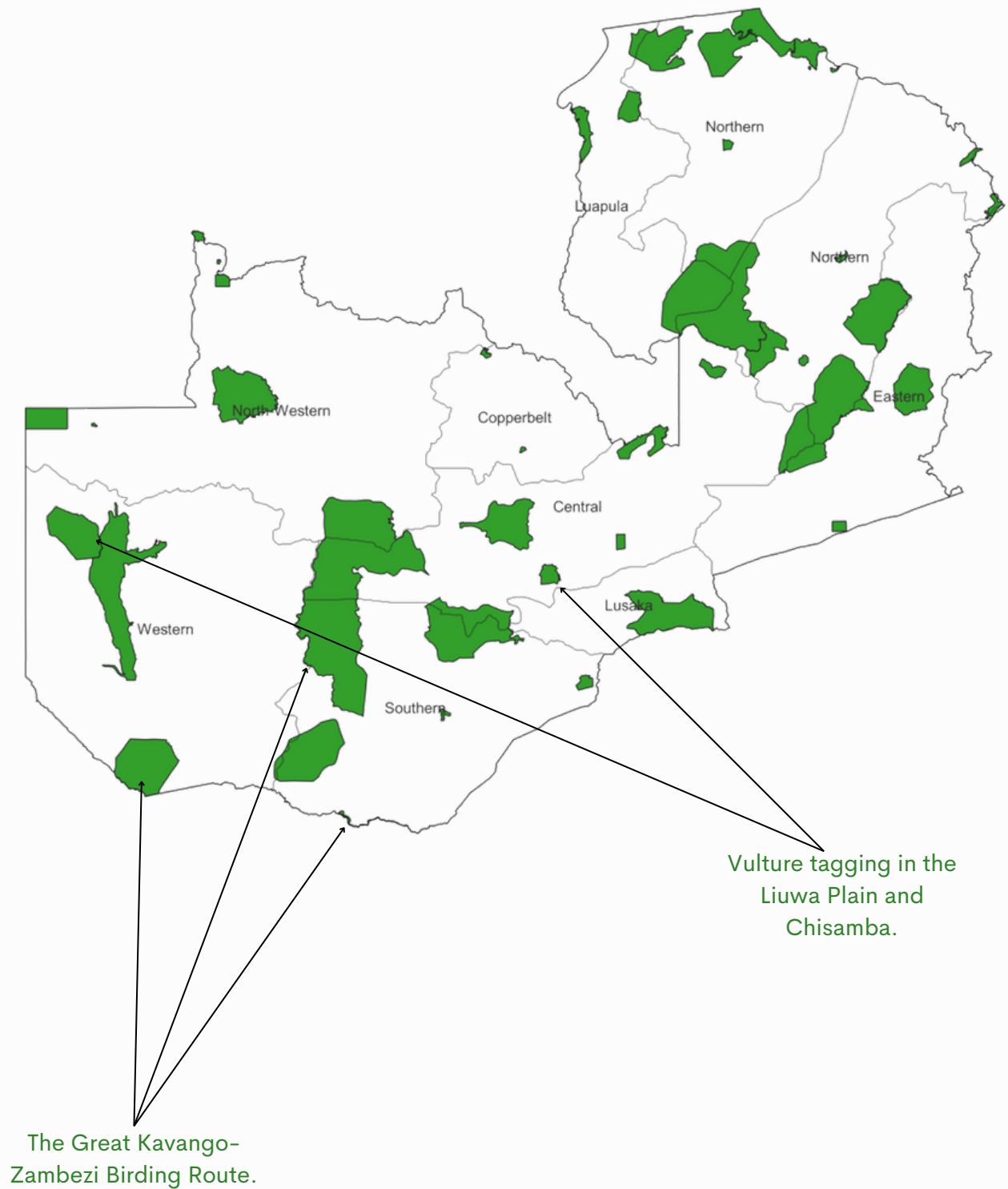
Seeing a dry country specialist such as the Marico Flycatcher on the front cover makes for a nice change and is part of the birding tourism being developed in the south west of the country. You can read more about it in this issue. Projects like this have been successful in other countries, and I have actually made use of birding route information whilst travelling in South Africa before, so this development here in Zambia is a strong positive for us.

The map of vulture movements on page 10 is particularly interesting! With the extensive work being done on vultures in Zambia now, one must always be on the lookout for tags whenever you visit places with vultures, you never know, you may just be able to contribute to movement data.

We hope you enjoy this issue and we look forward to seeing more developments from the Kaza Birding Route in the future, with Zambian birders contributing to the success of this project.

Yours in birding
Damian Newmarch and Andrew Mbenjile

Ashy flycatcher, Ngonye River Camp.
Andrew Mbenjile



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Vulture tagging in the Liuwa Plain and Chisamba areas in 2023

Frank Willems



Among top priorities of BirdWatch Zambia's team are conservation and research on the highly threatened vulture species that Zambia is so lucky to still boost large populations of. The Zambian Vulture Conservation Project combines the efforts of BWZ with that of various key partners such as Caring for Conservation (C4C) and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT). Fitting of tracking devices in recent years has revealed great movements covering many countries, as well as fascinating "sub-flyways" highlighting key areas for Zambia's vultures. Strong evidence is obtained for the critical role of Zambia's protected areas network as well as the "vulture restaurants" voluntarily maintained by Zambia's farmers, often under the umbrella of BWZ's Vulture Safe Zone programme. It also shows us where to avoid development of dangerous infrastructure, like wind turbines and powerlines, provides information on mortality causes and other threats.

With huge gratitude to C4C and the Leibniz Institute for putting the critical funding on the table, and the facilitating roles of partners like DNPW and African Parks Network, 14 transmitters (11 e-OBS and 3 Spoortrack units) were available for a tagging mission this year. We decided on the Liuwa Plain National Park, which falls in the centre of a little-studied flyway which connects Zambia with Angola, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. In addition, we deployed units in the Chisamba area where the vulture restaurants attract vultures from all directions, originating from at least 7 countries. We formed a strong core team combining lots of experience with vultures and ecosystems within and beyond Zambia, with Mary Malasa and myself on behalf of BWZ, plus Tom Riffel (C4C) and André Botha (EWT).



Vultures are only one part of Liuwa's abundant birdlife.

For Liuwa, we had the most useful assistance from Robin Pope, Daan Smit and others from the Zambian Carnivore Programme team and Sarah Weiner from African Parks, adding vast knowledge of the area and great company. Last but not least, Wildlife Police Officer Sienge Kawanga ensured not only our safety but also our enjoyment of the trip.

Five trapping days in Liuwa proved very productive, in terms of the numbers but especially the diversity of scavengers caught. As expected, White-backed Vultures were the most commonly caught species (7 birds, of which 6 tagged). Absolute highlights were a young and an adult Lappet-faced Vulture. These powerful giants required our full dedication and skill. What a privilege to handle and tag such magnificent creatures. Two of the uncommon White-headed Vultures are nearly as large though rather docile in the hand. Both were tagged as well. We further caught and ringed two eagles: an adult Bateleur, which was just pure beauty, and a beautiful fulvous morph Tawny Eagle to complement the catches.

The main challenge may have been all the other wildlife that was making a concerted effort to distract us. Cheetahs, Spotted Hyena, Wildebeest, Buffalo, Zebra, Steinbuck and Oribi were just some of the many mammals seen. Although last year's Lesser Yellowlegs seemed now absent, we were entertained by endless birdlife including Secretarybirds, lots of pelicans and cranes, 20 Saddle-billed Storks in a single flock, the many different lark species, White-bellied and Denham's Bustards, African Skimmer, a range of waders including Pied Avocets, White-fronted Plovers and Curlew Sandpipers, and so on. An interesting surprise was a Black Sparrowhawk, which seems a first record for Liuwa.



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Cheetahs are among the large carnivores of Liuwa Plain, providing daily carcasses to support healthy vulture populations.

In Chisamba, we focussed on Fringilla, where we had 3 days for trapping (21–23 July). This proved perfectly timed as it coincided with an eventful evening centred around a performance of the Black Mamba Man at Fringilla! Fortunately, we were home and dry before he climbed the stage, having deployed all 4 remaining units on White-backed Vultures during the first two days, with a marabou as an interesting bycatch. The brilliant assistance from Alex and Andrew Woodley and others from Fringilla was key here. Or was it the motivation rendered from the watching eyes of Michael Riffel (C4C) and the accompanying delegation of ladies from German television and research institutes, as well as some well-known Chisamba residents?



A feisty White-backed Vulture



Lappet-faced Vulture

All in all, we had a very successful tagging mission, significantly strengthening the number of vultures tagged in Zambia. This is part of a very significant increase in the number of vultures tagged this year. In addition to Liuwa and Chisamba, Mary and André continued for tagging in the Lower Zambezi and Luangwa Valleys, which will be reported on separately. Further, our colleagues from North Carolina Zoo are deploying a good number of tags this year in Kafue NP and the northeastern parts of Zambia. The data will massively improve our understanding of the movement ecology of vultures and assist in the best management of our hugely important wilderness areas.

Unravelling Vulture Movement Patterns in Zambia

Tom Riffel and Mary Malasa

Vulture tagging typically involves attaching transmitters to vultures to track their movements and study their behaviour. These efforts provide valuable data, helping us understand vulture movement patterns, habitat preferences, and migration routes. In Zambia, vultures have been tagged from four projects/organizations since 2021. Here is a summary up to September 2023:

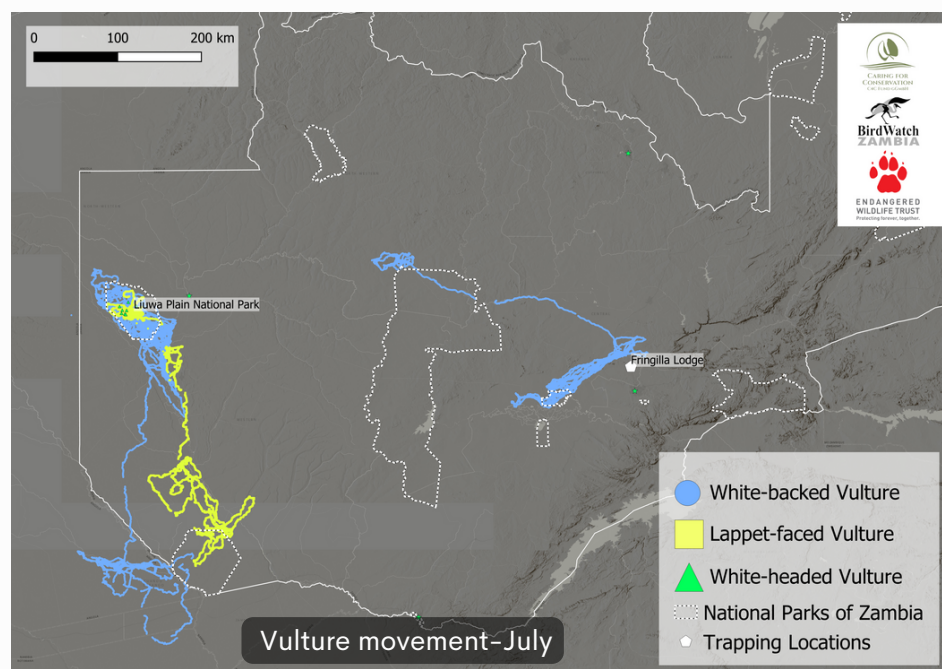
The **Zambian Vulture Conservation Program (ZVCP)**, a collaboration involving the Caring For Conservation Fund, BirdWatch Zambia, and the Endangered Wildlife Trust, has been tagging birds since 2021. These tagged birds have been observed in various locations, including Luambe National Park, Liuwa Plain National Park, Kasanka National Park, Bangweulu Wetlands, and Chisamba. In 2023, the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research joined forces with ZVCP, contributing additional tracking units.

The North Carolina Zoo and Panthera have tagged multiple birds across Kafue National Park since October 2021 over a period of three years.

BioCarbon Partners, in collaboration with BirdWatch Zambia and the Endangered Wildlife Trust, has tagged birds in Munyamadzi Game Reserve in the southern Luangwa Valley and the Lower Zambezi National Park. Conservation South Luangwa has tagged several birds in South Luangwa National Park, near Mfuwe.

Currently, there are a total of 57 active tracking units in Zambia. The majority of these tags have been fitted to White-backed Vultures, with smaller numbers on Hooded Vultures, Lappet-faced Vultures, and White-headed Vultures.

Analysing movement data from the past three years has unveiled intriguing dynamics and patterns. In certain regions, the data is still too recent to draw definitive conclusions.



Eastern Flyway: Over the last three years, data indicates that the Luangwa and Zambezi Valleys constitute a flyway that commonly extends southward into Zimbabwe. Birds tend to follow these geographically separated valleys and rarely cross the Muchinga or Nyika escarpments. It is notable that birds flying further south tend to frequent suburban areas, possibly to benefit from leftovers of pigs, cattle, and other livestock farms.

Central Flyway: In 2022, multiple birds were tagged in Bangweulu Wetlands and Kasanka National Park. Given their close proximity, it is not surprising that these birds follow a shared flyway. Interestingly, vultures from both locations primarily move between the protected areas and the urban areas of Mkushi, Chisamba, and Lusaka. This pattern is a consequence of voluntarily operated "vulture restaurants" that provide vultures with a steady and safe food supply, typically from butcheries and livestock farms. These areas around vulture restaurants appear to serve as hubs for vultures from various parts of Zambia, which might otherwise remain as separate populations.

Southern Flyway: Vultures tagged in Kafue National Park exhibit an east-west movement pattern within the Kafue ecosystem, moving between the park and Kafue Flats, and as far as the vulture restaurants around Lusaka. Movement patterns from White-backed vultures tagged in south, central and northern Kafue suggest a potential subpopulation structure within the ecosystem. There is a common flyway south, with birds regularly travelling to northern Botswana, Zimbabwe, and the Caprivi protected areas. These data have helped to identify corridor routes also used by carnivores, supporting Panthera's conservation efforts and the broader KAZA objectives around connectivity between key protected areas.

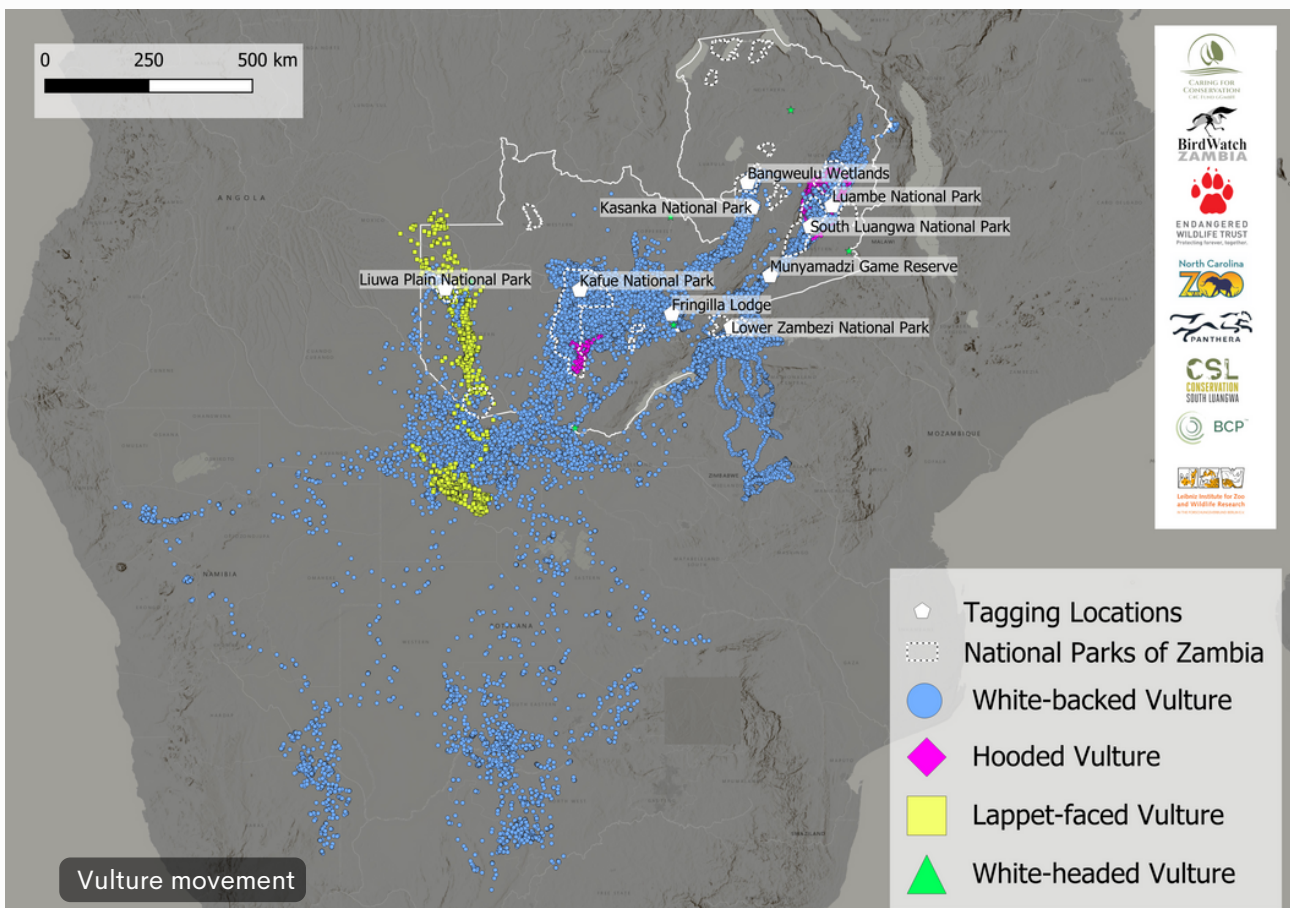
Western Flyway: Similar to the Eastern and Central flyways, vultures tagged in Liuwa Plain National Park follow a north-south trajectory. During the summer, when vultures are not actively breeding, these Liuwa birds often visit the northern Botswana, Zimbabwe, and the Caprivi protected areas. Interestingly, some Liuwa-tagged birds repeatedly visited the Lower Zambezi area. In doing so, the vultures tend to pass through multiple protected areas in northern Botswana and Zimbabwe rather than taking the shortest route through Zambia to reach their destination. This preference for following the extent of protected areas has also been observed in Luangwa birds.



In the context of the Lower Zambezi region, tagged vultures in the area spend a substantial amount of time across the river in the Mana Pools region, and they exhibit movements between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Specifically, all four of the tagged vultures spend more time on the Zimbabwean side and briefly move across the river to Zambia before returning to the other side. Their movements so far have been restricted to the Mana Pools area.

Lappet-faced vultures, presently only tagged in Liuwa Plain National Park, exhibit north-south movements, extending as far as Angola and the Okavango Delta. Hooded Vultures are known to have smaller home ranges, which is reflected in the limited number of tagged birds in Zambia. White-headed Vultures, of which two have been tagged in Liuwa Plain National Park in 2023, and in Lower Zambezi National Park in 2023 establish territories when fully mature, covering smaller ranges compared to other vulture species. However, the data is still too recent to provide a comprehensive interpretation of their movements.

It's important to note that these movement patterns are not fixed, for example, it will be affected by the bird's breeding activities in any given year. Birds from different areas may still occasionally interchange between flyways. Young birds, in particular, undertake long journeys, including travels to countries further south and west, even reaching as far as South Africa. Ongoing efforts aim to expand the sample size in the coming years to gain a deeper understanding of vulture movement dynamics in Zambia. Special appreciation to all partners involved in this initiative for their unwavering dedication, relentless efforts, and collaborative spirit.



The Great Kavango-Zambezi Birding Route.

Zambia Scoping

Andrew Mbenjile



Busanga plains scenery.

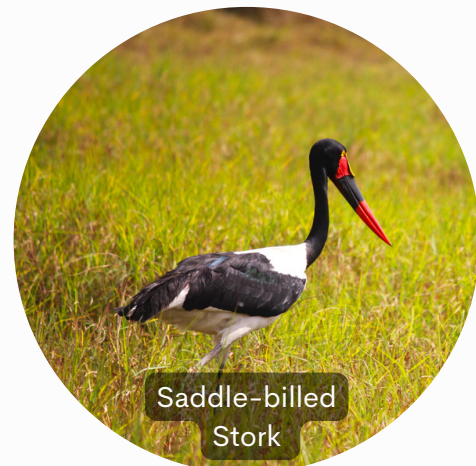
Tourism is widely recognised as one of the most significant contributors to export earnings in any economy. It creates jobs, strengthens the local economy, contributes to local infrastructure development, can help conserve the natural environment and cultural assets and traditions, and reduces poverty and inequality. Birding tourism is undoubtedly one of the fastest-growing nature-based tourism activities worldwide and has been experiencing growth in interest and popularity in Africa over the past years. The Kavango Zambezi Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) is home to renowned tourism destinations for the Southern African region due to the diversity in avifauna boasting over 600 bird species. The diverse natural wonders in the landscape make it an attractive and competitive multi-faceted international nature-based tourism destination. With avitourism already established within the KAZA landscape and the strong presence of overlapping interest activities in the region, it makes sense to invest in, promote and package the region's avian assets as a product for avitourists. The KAZA TFCA also caters to large-scale migrations of megafauna and contributes to the conservation of threatened species such as the African Wild Dog, Lion, and Cheetah as well as playing host to the largest contiguous population of African Elephant on the continent.



Male Puku



Male Lion



Saddle-billed
Stork



Guided tour of Napene Island.

BirdWatch Zambia along with other BirdLife partners in the region (BirdLife Zimbabwe & BirdLife Botswana), and Namibia Nature Foundation involved in the preservation of birds and their habitats are working with governments in their respective countries to coordinate the development of the Kavango-Zambezi Birding Route through the Great KAZA Birding Route Project. The project aims to develop and package a comprehensive birdwatching route through the 5 states of the Kavango Zambezi TFCA (Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, and Angola) with various nodes that showcase the region's avian attractions and diversity while also connecting with neighbouring attractions within and beyond the partner countries. The project looks to achieve this by identifying and mapping a network of birding hotspots and birder-friendly accommodation types with specialist bird guides that will be upskilled and/or trained to connect avitourists with local birding spectacles along the route. This is also seen as an opportunity to increase their conservation mandate by promoting avitourism in the region.

As part of the GKBR project, a team from BirdWatch Zambia (BWZ), BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) and Zambia Tourism Agency (ZTA) conducted the scoping exercise from 1st to 14th June 2023. The purpose of the scoping activity was to identify avitourism-friendly products, and key birding sites, engage key stakeholders, and conduct guide capacity assessment for guides from selected establishments within KAZA TFCA.



The itinerary for the scoping exercise in Zambia began from Lusaka where we drove down to Livingstone with Chinga Lufwino a colleague from BirdWatch Zambia to commence the scoping on the 1st of June 2023. In Livingstone, we were joined by Liam Charlton (BirdLife Zimbabwe), Justine Mbanga (Zambia Tourism Agency) and Moses Wamunyima (Zambia Tourism Agency) who were part of the scoping team. We engaged key stakeholders such as the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW), Birding Zambia, Zambezi Birding/Nampene Island, Destination Livingstone, and Waterberry Lodge among others. After several engagements in the tourist capital, we moved in the northwestern direction where we also engaged Simalaha Community Conservancy on the way to Siomangwezi. After some engagements in Siomangwezi, we made our way back on the same route for the next major part of the journey toward Kafue National Park. On our way to Kafue National Park, we explored the Machile area – which proved to be challenging due to the bad roads and signage. Despite the bad roads, the trip paid off as I finally got to see my first ever Black-checked Lovebirds in the Machile area! After getting lost a couple of times, we finally made it to Kafue NP after a very long day of travel. We engaged several stakeholders in Kafue NP including African Parks and other accommodation service providers in the south, central and north of the park before heading to Lusaka on the 14th of June.



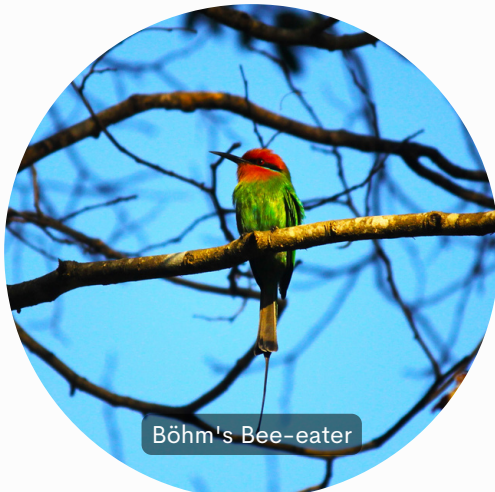
Wouter (middle), **Andrew** (left) and **Liam** (right) visiting some of the key birding hotspots in Livingstone.

Hilary (left), **Justine** (second from left) **Liam** (middle), **Rosie** (second from right) and **Andrew** (right) pose for a picture after a successful meeting with key stakeholders in Livingstone.

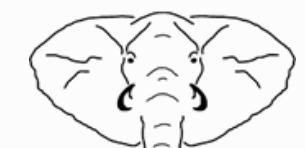
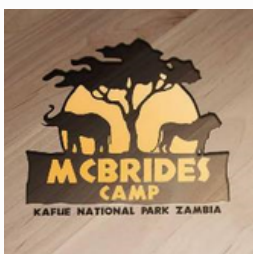


It was an interesting 2 weeks of stakeholder engagement and birding within the prestigious KAZA TFCA. We witnessed the amazing birdlife and wildlife that KAZA TFCA offers and how much avitourism potential there is in the landscape. We were using eBird and BirdLasser to record species while Merlin ID and Birds of Zambia Apps helped with species identification. A total of 257 species were recorded in a space of 2 weeks and this includes several KAZA specials such as; Fülleborn's Longclaw, Rosy-throated Longclaw, Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow, Black-faced Waxbill, Scaly Weaver, Marico Sunbird, Ashy Flycatcher, Red-eyed Bulbul, Black-cheeked Lovebird, Dickinson's Kestrel, Böhm's Bee-eater, Pel's Fishing-Owl, African Skimmer, Lesser Jacana, African Finfoot and Coqui Francolin among others. Other amazing wildlife seen included Elephants, Lions, Buffaloes and Hippos.

Without any doubt, Zambia has the most astonishing avitourism marvels in the KAZA region! If only the government could work towards improving connectivity and accessibility to various birding hotspots within the landscape, we would develop a tourism product that would entice tourists from any part of the world to visit KAZA. Additionally, with improved connectivity, signage and a robust marketing strategy, there is no doubt that we will have increased tourist traffic within KAZA TFCA. Talking of boosting tourism in KAZA TFCA, this unique landscape has a lot to offer! It is such an honour to be part of this great initiative and I look forward to seeing the completion of the Great KAZA Birding Route!



A big thank you to our supporting partners—The Isdell Family Foundation, Wildlife Crime Prevention, Elephant Charge and The International Crane Foundation. Our corporate and Small Business Sponsors – thank you for your support to bird conservation in Zambia. The editor of the Wattled Crane will occasionally position adverts where relevant for their use in certain articles— and will rotate sponsor logos monthly into core position in the publication when possible.



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