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An electronic journal published by the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town

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Paper Editor: H. Dieter Oschadleus and Amour McCarthy

RETURN TO A ZAMBIAN JEWEL:
A RESEARCH STAY AT MUTINONDO WILDERNESS LODGE

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Recommended citation format:

URL: http://bo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=326

Published online: 28 June 2017

– ISSN 2219-0341 –
In the beginning of March 2016, my husband (Thomas) and I spent six grace-filled days ringing birds at Mutinondo Wilderness Lodge in northern Zambia (12°27’S 31°17’E).

Shortly after we had left the car we looked at each other with the same thought: This is a place where we would like to spend some weeks for bird ringing.

Birdlife was like a miracle and this experience became richer and more profound by the extensive knowledge, experience and enthusiasm of lodge manager Frank Willems, and Michael Mills, our South African bird guide, specialising in Angolan birds and bird sounds in general.

The land is pristine miombo woodland with giant whale-back rocks and dambos that drain their waters through evergreen forest patches. The island mountains and vistas unfolded a sense of earth before humanity, of a timelessness before we had names. This purity and variety of habitats hosts a huge number of bird species, 356 have been recorded by now. For us, mainly ringing birds in the Namibian desert, it looked like paradise and it proved to be.

Figure 1 - View from the cabin.
Our hosts welcomed us with wonderful food and gracious accommodations. Our spacious, organically-grown-out-of-the-rock, grass-roofed chalet, one of four, offered us peaceful stillness and rest and captivating views. Small streams invited us for a bath after the day’s work, with no hippos, no crocs, no bilharzia, the Hamerkop nesting above, and Finfoot paddling silently. From the well cared for campsites we could see in the valley flocks of Eurasian Hobbies hunting dragonflies.

We returned 9 months later, in December 2016, for five weeks of daily bird ringing. Arriving, the lush paradise now was dry after a long time of drought and was black in many parts from the poachers’ fires. The trees were bare, the rivers and marsh shrunken. Only two days before our arrival the first rain for months had fallen. The rains stayed with us almost daily in all forms from drizzle to thunderstorms, and slowly Earth turned green again, bringing new varieties of flowers and insects every day.
Mutinondo is a birder’s paradise - chest high grass giving us Black-rumped Buttonquail, Broad-tailed Warblers and Grey-rumped Swallows. Senegal Coucals skulking along small streams of crystal water meandering through the marshy so-called dambos in the openings between pristine miombo forest, home of the Bar-winged Weaver and Anchieta’s Barbet.
Figure 7 - African Broadbill *Smithornis capensis*

Figure 8 - African Wood-owl *Strix woodfordii*

Figure 9 - Wahlberg`s Eagle *Aquila wahlbergii*
Figure 10 - White-tailed Blue Flycatcher *Elminia albicauda*

Figure 11 - Red-capped Crombec *Sylvietta ruficapilla*

Figure 12 - Green-capped Eremomela *Eremomela scotops*

Figure 13 - Black-rumped Buttonquail *Turnix nanus*
Dense thickets in steep gorges were home to the reclusive, brilliant Bocage’s Akalat and Cabanis’s, Little and Grey-olive Greenbuls.

We were surprised by a Spotted Creeper alone in a 15 m mist net; Black-throated Wattle-eye, Böhm’s, Ashy, Collared and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatchers; Meyer’s Parrot, Green-headed, Olive, Variable, Anchieta’s and Amethyst Sunbirds. Black-backed Barbets, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, Stierling’s Wren-warbler, Pale-crowned, Stout, Trilling, Zitting, Red-faced and Short-winged Cisticolas.
The other-worldly call of the Ground Hornbill echoing by day was matched by the Spotted Hyaena song at night. Ross's Turaco flashing through the trees on a quiet afternoon, while Schalow's Touracos were heard croaking; we felt redeemed, reset to our initial conditions.

A special treat were the Palearctic migrants: Tree Pipits, Collared Flycatchers, Whitethroats, Garden, Marsh, Sedge and Great Reed Warblers, Thrush Nightingales and as a highlight, a River Warbler.

Figure 17 - Cabanis's Bunting Emberiza cabanisi

Figure 18 - Great Reed Warbler Acrocephalus arundinaceus

Figure 19 - Thrush Nightingale Luscinia luscinia
We saw more than 170 species and ringed 700 birds of over 100 species.

**Mutinondo Wilderness Birdlist, updated 1 January 2017**

This list was compiled by Frank Willems, the manager, based on the observations of the owner over the last 10 or so years. The species names in **bold mean birds seen**, the ones in *italic are species ringed*, by the authors in two ringing visits (March and December 2016).

1. Little Grebe
2. Little Bittern
3. Dwarf Bittern
4. White-backed Night Heron
5. **Rufous-bellied Heron**
6. *Cattle Egret*
7. **Green-backed Heron**
8. Great White Egret
9. *Hamerkop*
10. **Openbill Stork**
11. Black Stork
12. *Abdim’s Stork*
13. Woolly-necked Stork
14. White Stork
15. Marabou Stork
16. Hadada
17. White-faced Whistling Duck
18. Spur-winged Goose
19. Comb (Knob-billed) Duck
20. **African Black Duck**
21. *Yellow-billed Duck*
22. Southern Pochard
23. African Cuckoo Hawk
24. Honey Buzzard
25. Bat Hawk
26. Black-shouldered Kite
27. **Black (Yellowbilled) Kite**
28. African Fish-Eagle
29. Palm-nut Vulture
30. Hooded Vulture
31. African White-backed Vulture
32. **Lappet-faced Vulture**
33. White-headed Vulture
34. **Black-chested Snake-Eagle**
35. Brown Snake-Eagle
36. Western Banded Snake-Eagle

*Figure 20 - River Warbler Locustella fluviatilis*
37. Bateleur
38. African Harrier-Hawk (Gymnogene)
39. Western (European) Marsh-Harrier
40. African Marsh Harrier
41. Pallid Harrier
42. Montagu's Harrier
43. Dark Chanting Goshawk
44. Gabar Goshawk
45. Black Goshawk
46. Ovambo Sparrowhawk
47. Little Sparrowhawk
48. African Goshawk
49. Shikra
50. Lizard Buzzard
51. Common Buzzard
52. Augur Buzzard
53. Wahlberg's Eagle
54. Lesser Spotted Eagle
55. Steppe Eagle
56. Verreaux's (Black) Eagle
57. African Hawk-Eagle
58. Booted Eagle
59. Long-crested Eagle
60. African Crowned Eagle
61. Martial Eagle
62. Lesser Kestrel
63. Eastern Red-footed Kestrel
64. Dickinson's Kestrel
65. Eurasian (European) Hobby
66. African Hobby
67. Lanner Falcon
68. Peregrine Falcon
69. Coqui Francolin
70. Shelley's Francolin
71. Hildebrandt's Francolin
72. Red-necked Spurfowl (Francolin)
73. Blue Quail
74. Helmeted Guineafowl
75. Kurrichane Buttonquail
76. Black-rumped Buttonquail
77. Red-chested Flufftail
78. Long-toed Flufftail
79. Corn Crake
80. African Crake
81. Lesser Moorhen
82. African Finfoot
83. Black-bellied Bustard
84. African Jacana
85. Lesser Jacana
86. Painted Snipe
87. Water Thick-knee
88. Bronze-winged Courser
89. Temminck's Courser
90. Senegal Wattled Plover
91. Greenshank
92. Green Sandpiper
93. Wood Sandpiper
94. Common Sandpiper
95. Double-banded Sandgrouse
96. Laughing Dove
97. Cape Turtle Dove
98. Red-eyed Dove
99. Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove
100. African Green Pigeon
101. Grey-headed (Brown-necked) Parrot
102. Meyer's Parrot
103. Schalow's Turaco
104. (Lady) Ross's Turaco
105. Grey Go-away-bird
106. Great Spotted Cuckoo
107. Levaillant’s Cuckoo
108. Thick-billed Cuckoo
109. **Red-chested Cuckoo**
110. Black Cuckoo
111. Common Cuckoo
112. African Cuckoo
113. African Emerald Cuckoo
114. Klaas’s Cuckoo
115. Diederick Cuckoo
116. **Black Coucal**
117. **Coppery-tailed Coucal**
118. Senegal Coucal
119. **Barn Owl**
120. **African Grass-Owl**
121. **African Scops-Owl**
122. **Southern White-faced Scops-Owl**
123. **Spotted Eagle-Owl**
124. Giant Eagle-Owl
125. **African Barred Owlet**
126. **African Wood Owl**
127. **Marsh Owl**
128. **Fiery-necked Nightjar**
129. Swamp (Natal) Nightjar
130. **Freckled (Rock) Nightjar**
131. Square-tailed (Gaboon) Nightjar
132. **Pennant-winged Nightjar**
133. **African Palm Swift**
134. European Swift
135. Little Swift
136. White-rumped Swift
137. Narina Trogon
138. **Half-collared Kingfisher**
139. **Malachite Kingfisher**
140. **African Pygmy-Kingfisher**
141. **Brown-hooded Kingfisher**
142. Grey-headed (Chestnut-bellied) Kingfisher
143. Woodland Kingfisher
144. Striped Kingfisher
145. Giant Kingfisher
146. Pied Kingfisher
147. Little Bee-eater
148. White-cheeked Bee-eater
149. Swallow-tailed Bee-eater
150. **Madagascar (Olive) Bee-eater**
151. **European Bee-eater**
152. Southern Carmine Bee-eater
153. **European Roller**
154. Lilac-breasted Roller
155. Racket-tailed Roller
156. **Broad-billed Roller**
157. **Green Wood Hoopoe**
158. Common Scimitarbill
159. African Hoopoe
160. **Crowned Hornbill**
161. **Pale-billed Hornbill**
162. Trumpeter Hornbill
163. **Southern Ground Hornbill**
164. **Anchieta’s Barbet**
165. Whyte’s Barbet
166. **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird**
167. **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird**
168. Miombo Pied Barbet
169. **Black-collared Barbet**
170. **Black-backed Barbet**
171. **Green-backed Honeyguide**
172. **Scaly-throated Honeyguide**
173. Greater Honeyguide
174. **Lesser Honeyguide**
175. Eastern Least Honeyguide
176. Bennett's Woodpecker
177. Golden-tailed Woodpecker
178. Green-backed Woodpecker
179. Cardinal Woodpecker
180. Bearded Woodpecker
181. Olive Woodpecker
182. African Broadbill
183. Flappet Lark
184. Dusky Lark
185. Red-capped Lark
186. Black Saw-wing
187. White-headed Saw-wing
188. Sand Martin
189. Banded Martin
190. Grey-rumped Swallow
191. Mosque Swallow
192. Lesser Striped Swallow
193. Rock Martin
194. Blue Swallow
195. Barn Swallow
196. Common House-Martin
197. Yellow Wagtail
198. Grey Wagtail
199. Mountain Wagtail
200. African Pied Wagtail
201. Long-billed Pipit
202. Plain-backed Pipit
203. Buffy Pipit
204. Bushveld Pipit
205. Tree Pipit
206. Striped Pipit
207. Fulleborn's Longclaw
208. Black Cuckoo-shrike
209. Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike
210. White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike
211. Little Greenbul
212. Yellow-throated Leaflove
213. Grey-olive Bulbul
214. Cabanis's Greenbul
215. Dark-capped Bulbul
216. Miombo Rock-Thrush
217. Kurrichane Thrush
218. (West) African Thrush
219. Groundscraper Thrush
220. Bocage's Akalat
221. Thrush Nightingale
222. White-browed Robin-chat
223. Central Bearded Scrub Robin
224. White-browed Scrub Robin
225. Stonechat
226. Capped Wheatear
227. Familiar Chat
228. Sooty Chat
229. Arnot's Chat
230. Mocking Chat
231. Broad-tailed Warbler
232. Little Rush Warbler
233. Evergreen Forest Warbler
234. African Moustached Warbler
235. River Warbler
236. Sedge Warbler
237. Eurasian Reed Warbler
238. Marsh Warbler
239. Great Reed Warbler
240. African Yellow Warbler
241. Green-capped Eremomela
242. Black-collared Eremomela
243. Yellow-bellied Eremomela
244. Red-capped Crombec
245. Willow Warbler
246. Laura's Warbler
247. Yellow-bellied Hyliola
248. Southern Hyliola
249. Garden Warbler
250. Common Whitethroat
251. Pale-crowned Cisticola
252. Zitting Cisticola
253. Croaking Cisticola
254. Stout Cisticola
255. Rattling Cisticola
256. Short-winged Cisticola
257. Rock-loving Cisticola
258. Red-faced Cisticola
259. Trilling Cisticola
260. Chimping Cisticola
261. Tawny-flanked Prinia
262. Bar-throated Apalis
263. Brown-headed (Grey) Apalis
264. Stierling's Wren-warbler
265. Pallid Flycatcher
266. Southern Black Flycatcher
267. Collared Flycatcher
268. Spotted Flycatcher
269. Dusky Flycatcher
270. Ashy Flycatcher
271. Boehm's Flycatcher
272. Lead-coloured Flycatcher
273. Chinspot Batis
274. Black-throated Wattle-eye
275. White-tailed Blue Flycatcher
276. White-tailed Crested Flycatcher
277. African Paradise Flycatcher
278. Arrow-marked Babbler
279. Hautlaub's Babbler
280. Miombo Tit
281. White-winged Black Tit
282. Rufous-bellied Tit
283. Grey Penduline-Tit
284. Spotted Creeper
285. Red-and-blue Sunbird
286. Violet-backed Sunbird
287. Collared Sunbird
288. Olive Sunbird
289. Green-headed Sunbird
290. Amethyst Sunbird
291. Scarlet-chested Sunbird
292. Yellow-bellied Sunbird
293. Miombo Double-collared Sunbird
294. Coppery Sunbird
295. Yellow White-eye
296. Eurasian Golden Oriole
297. African Golden Oriole
298. Eastern Black-headed Oriole
299. Souza's Shrike
300. Red-backed Shrike
301. Lesser Grey Shrike
302. African Golden Oriole
303. Common Fiscal
304. Marsh Tchagra
305. Brown-crowned Tchagra
306. Black-crowned Tchagra
307. Tropical Boubou
308. Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike
309. Grey-headed Bush-Shrike
310. White-crested Helmet Shrike
Beyond our retraps of birds ringed at our first visit nine months before this stay, there were two recaptures from former ringing activities:

A Bar-throated Apalis ringed by Lizanne Roxburgh in 2007 (http://safring.adu.org.za/ring_info.php?ring=GA54807) was caught again in 2016. This tiny bird of 11.4 grams had reached an age of more than 8 years and 4 months, while the longevity record stands at 10 years and one month in this species in all southern Africa. Still, out of more than 750 documented retraps in Zambia, this would be the sixth oldest Bar-throated Apalis. See longevity record for this species at http://safring.adu.org.za/ring_info.php?ring=AD65836.

A Collared Sunbird of 8.8 grams (ring number W55076, see http://safring.adu.org.za/ring_info.php?ring=W55076) was retrapped in Mutinondo Wilderness Lodge after 8 years and one month. The age of the bird is not exactly known, as it was already ringed as an adult male. The oldest bird of this species in the SAFRING data base reached 10 years and 11 days on Nchalo Sugar Estate in Malawi. See longevity record at http://safring.adu.org.za/ring_info.php?ring=AA55981.
We hope to continue our work in the years to come.

**Acknowledgements**

Our thanks go to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife and BirdWatch Zambia for granting the ringing permit, to Dane Paijmans from SAFRING for providing the retrap data and to our hosts Frank Willems and Inge Akerboom who spoiled us in all imaginable ways.

This paper was first published in The Wattled Crane (BirdLife Zambia), Vol. 47/3, March/April 2017, p. 2 - 10, ISSN 03784533. It has been reprinted with permission, with minor editorial changes.