

## **BIRDING AFRICA 2012 ANGOLA EXPEDITION**

Report by Michael Mills

Birding Africa's 2012 comprehensive Angola Expedition follows our very successful 2011 trip, the first ever trip to see all Angolan endemics. This year our trip commenced and concluded in Luanda, avoiding the long drive from Windhoek and the arduous land-border crossing, and allowing a full 19 days of birding in Angola. We once again saw all the endemics, plus some other desirable specials, not least Brazza's Martin and Bocage's Sunbird. From Luanda we drove north towards the northern scarp forests of Kwanza Norte/Uige. Our first stop – a random roadside one – produced an amazing start, with dry thickets and forest turning up a few surprises, including Monteiro's Bushshrike and Gabela Helmetshrike, the most northerly records of these two rarities. Other birds here were Angola Batis, Pale-olive Greenbul, Bubbling Cisticola and Hartert's Camaroptera among our very first species. At the northern scarp forests we found our main target, Braun's Bushshrike, without too much difficulty, and other highlights included Forest Scrub Robin, Gorgeous (Perrin's) Bushshrike, Black-collared Bulbul, Red-headed Bluebill, Orange-tufted Sunbird and the Olivebacks (still to be identified) first discovered on our 2011 tour. Then on to the gallery forests and miombo woodlands north of Kalandula Falls, with Angola Lark en route, where White-headed Robin-Chat showed well and other noteworthy birds included African Barred Owlet, Pale-billed Hornbill, Sharp-tailed Starling, Anchieta's Barbet, Anchieta's Sunbird, Bannerman's Sunbird and a perched Thick-billed Cuckoo. We then started the long journey south, stopping en route at Kissama National Park's dry forest and savanna to notch up White-fronted Wattle-eye, our first of many Red-backed Mousebirds, Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush, some non-breeding Golden-backed Bishops, Loanda Swift and some flushed Grey-striped Francolin. Beyond Benguela we started to encounter more arid-land species, with highlights en route to Lubango including Bare-cheeked Babbler, Ludwig's Bustard, Rüppell's Parrot, Monteiro's Hornbill, White-tailed Shrike, and best of all a confiding Cinderella Waxbill and some very tame Benguela Long-billed Larks. At Lubango, the forests and cliffs around Tundavala treated us to spectacular views of Swierstra's Francolin, Angola Slaty Flycatcher, Rockrunner, Bocage's Akalat, Angola (Swee) Waxbill and Ludwig's Sunbird. Then on to the most exciting area of the trip, the forests, grasslands and woodlands of the Mount Moco area, with Red-throated Cliff Swallow on the way. The area did not disappoint, and highlights included Fernando Po Swift, Finsch's Francolin, many great sightings of Black-and-rufous Swallow, Rock-loving Cisticola, Stout Cisticola, Salvadori's Eremomela, Black-collared Eremomela, Oustalet's Sunbird, Dusky Twinspot, Fülleborn's Longclaw, Anchieta's Barbet, Souza's Shrike, Boehm's Flycatcher, Red-capped Crombec, and the three big B's, Brazza's Martin, Bocage's Weaver and Bocage's Sunbird. We then visited the central scarp forests at Kumbira, with Rufous-bellied Heron en route, where we enjoyed great looks at Red-crested Turaco, Gabela Bushshrike, Gabela Akalat, Pulitzer's Longbill and Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye. Back at Kissama we enjoyed good but brief views of Grey-striped Francolin, as it stepped onto the road before taking flight, with a final stop at Mussulo Bay's mudflats to boost our bird count to over 500 with a variety of waterbirds.