

30 May 2008 I finally took my Canon to Kitwe!

I stayed for 15 days in the first-floor room of a guesthouse in Kitwe with a magnificent view of the garden from the balcony – at tree-top level - and was able to photograph the post-dawn pre-breakfast (mine!) comings and goings of the local birds.

The Pied Crow has seemingly taken over the urban areas of the Zambian Copperbelt. This may be one reason that in five trips in the past few months I have seen not a single Cape Turtle or Laughing Dove in Kitwe or Ndola (and only one Red-eyed Dove!) – the other reason could of course be purely culinary!

One particular tree was invaded every day at sunrise by a large flock of Speckled Mousebird, which settled down to a mutual preening session. It was impossible to avoid the ubiquitous and noisy Dark-capped Bulbul, while other daily visitors included African Yellow White-Eye, Coppery Sunbird and Bronze Mannikin. Almost daily visitors were a Black-backed Puffback, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Yellow-throated Leaf-Love, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, White-browed Robin-Chat.

Less frequent visitors were a Black-backed Barbet, a juvenile male Purple-banded Sunbird and a male Variable Sunbird. I spent a couple of hours early on my free Sunday morning in Kitwe some 25km west of the town at the Chembe Bird Sanctuary. It had only just opened in 1974 when I paid my first and only previous visit there and saw my only Pygmy Goose until 3 years ago at Muzi Pans. The years have taken their toll and the sanctuary has just lost its national wildlife society sponsorship, its manager passed away last December and he has not been replaced, and 1200mm of summer rains have left its 7km circular road virtually impassable. This road sits within the fringes of pristine Miombo woodland around a large dam and wetland - probably the equivalent of Marievale in extent. I was amazed (probably horrified is a better description) to see absolutely no ducks, coots, moorhens, geese - in fact not one single bird on the several square kilometres of water. The woodland was practically dead, apart from the calls of Red-eyed Doves and Emerald-spotted Wood-Doves. In fact the only water(ish) birds that I saw were Grey Heron, Purple Heron and African Jacana, with a pair of African Marsh-Harrier quartering the reed-beds, AND what rescued the morning was an unexpected lifer - the place was crawling with Rufous-bellied Heron (well, I saw 7!) and in the woodland - a Zambian first in a pair of Black-backed Barbet (had seen but not photographed them previously in the DRC).

Zambian Copperbelt

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Later that week, at our drill site near Ndola, there were some interested onlookers to our exploration work in a pair of Mosque Swallow and a male Shikra.

Photos can be seen in the **Newest Additions** gallery.

Neil