

Angola - June 2024

A travel report by Albert Voigts von Schütz

Reasons for this journey:

- Ornithological interest in new species and endemics
- Reliving the historical significance of York von Schütz's stay
- Investigating for Leaflove Safari whether Angola is ready for safari tourism, and whether the quality and safety of a trip can be guaranteed.

Travel Report

She never forgave him, I believe, but sitting around and doing nothing... that was not an option for York von Schütz. However, what was he supposed to do when he anxiously waited for the police car every day? "If they come in pairs, they're coming to get you," he had already been warned. Otto had already been taken away and was probably hopelessly sitting in an internment camp in Andalusia by now. Freedom was ingrained in York's character, and he did not want to stand idly by as the world perished and Germany possibly lost the war, but his wife Ursula already had three daughters and was pregnant again. Nevertheless, he went! Via Angola onto a ship and then to war. He didn't care about Hitler, but he certainly didn't want to sit back and watch!

If York had known what was really happening in Germany, how the Nazis pursued their sick ideal with such inhumanity, he certainly would have thought differently, that's for sure.

She loved him nonetheless, for the Ol' Lady, as he always called her, enjoyed a just, beloved, and fair life with this upright man who could never sleep in enclosed spaces and had never been drunk in his life.

My grandfather was captured in Angola and "held" on a coffee plantation for two years. Later, he would always be drawn back to "the most beautiful country in Africa." His descriptions began with enormous manta rays in crystal clear waters surrounded by paradisiacal islands and extended to wildlife-rich forests where he could hunt the red buffalo, known there as "Capassa." He was even attacked by one of these buffaloes and rammed into the ground... but that story would go beyond the scope here.

On his march through Ovamboland towards Angola, York constantly heard the announcing drumming of the various Bantu tribes, very suspicious, a white man without porters. He had to leave his faithful pack donkey behind because the poor animal became too interesting for many lions roaming around at night.

My own journey through Ovamboland towards Angola, wanting to see where my grandfather had walked, been captured, and later liked to return, showed a different picture. The drumming had turned into loud disco music from various shebeens, local bars in tin huts or brightly painted walls, lining the roadside of bustling villages. A black pig ran suicidally across the road in front of me, the first of what felt like hundreds on this trip. Donkeys and cattle seemed more comfortable on the tarmac than in the thick sand, and Makalani palms were now surrounded by numerous corrugated iron huts and simple dwellings; traditional huts are no longer up to date it seems. The air still partially smelled of the popular smoky Africa, and there was surprisingly little trash by the roadside, at least in some parts.

At the Palmeiras Lodge, a mosquito bit me on the back of my arm, and I twisted my back on the mattress, which was more like a modern hammock. What my grandfather probably wouldn't have noticed at all back then leads to sleepless nights for me, a modern softy I knew I am.

Since Angola was engulfed in civil war for many years and the country was considered "landmine-infested," is a trip there still a risk? I wonder if the threshold for violence, death, and compassion is still set too low, perhaps?

At the border, Andrew, known as a "fixer," was already waiting for me and assisted with the bureaucratic procedures. Despite the early hour and the deserted border, it still took over two hours. The officer struggled with the keyboard and couldn't enter the password his colleague spelled out over the phone. It seemed he couldn't find the hashtag and declined any help offered. Eventually, the colleague arrived in person, and after both chuckled at a YouTube video Officer No. 1 found during the wait, he apologised to me for the 52nd time and processed my passage. Along the road, I exchanged money and realised why no Angolan could ever own a wallet... Initially, I hid the stashes of Kwanza in "secret" places in the car.

I had already been laughed at for buying a Ford... In Africa, it's Toyota all the way, and there are plenty of reasons for that. But I wanted more comfort, speed, and affordability, and maybe something less likely to be stolen. After the trip, though, I can report that the car held up incredibly well despite potholes, dirt, mud, and other challenges. Plus, this four-wheel-drive accelerates and brakes like a sports car, qualities that are essential in Angola's chaotic traffic!

The first bird I spotted in Angola was a Cape Crow! This was followed by two parasitic Pied Crows, which are ubiquitous in Angola wherever human trash is found.

Like in Uganda, Angolan roads are packed with motorcycles, overloaded with people, goods, bananas, and even animals. Safety seems assured by constant horn honking and direct swerving towards the destination at full throttle. It seemed reckless, but somehow it worked. Meanwhile, I noticed that no one reacted to the honking anymore, which didn't stop people from honking incessantly.

I also wondered why I couldn't see any wading or water birds along these water bodies beside the road. When I observed a group of Blue Waxbills hoping to see Cinderellas, a young boy proudly shot down a Waxbill with his slingshot, which explained why.

Unfortunately, I must note that wildlife's fear of "Enemy No. 1," us humans, was very evident. This made it challenging to observe birds and even smaller mammals like bush squirrels. Everything kept its distance, and despite my Canon R5 with a new lens, capturing photos was a struggle.

I absolutely had to visit Tundavala for Africa's most beautiful view today.

In travel reports, Lubango was described as a Namibia-like city, and I entered with high expectations. However, the chaos here contrasted sharply with Namibia's residual order. It took me a while to find my accommodation and reach the impressive "Escarpment." Honestly, the view took my breath away—it was incredible to look into the endless expanse.

Even the throng of Himba beggars, with children, dogs, and women strategically stationed for begging, didn't bother me. Standing at the several hundred-meter-deep "Gap" was magnificent. Wailing Cisticolas hopped on rocks adorned with moss and lichen, their red crests adding color. Here, I was delighted to spot a long-awaited bird—the Angola Cave-Chat, charming and brave with a raised tail and melodic call. I was truly experiencing Angola, and it was stunningly beautiful!

On the slopes, red-blooming hanging aloes, likely *Aloe mendesii*, added to the scenery. Above, *Aloe scorpioides* stood decoratively on weathered, sculpture-worthy stones.

Philosophically, I thought about the Himba and questioned why many describe them as proud. To me, proud people do not beg! There's no doubt; my grandparents were extremely poor, sometimes living in mud huts, yet they would never have begged for alms. The nudity displayed by Namibian women as traditional dress within cities — would this exist without tourism? Are we sending the wrong signals?

In the deep gorge slightly south of the "Gap," I lingered, marvelling at hanging aloes, dense forests on rocky slopes, and the call of Swierstra's Spurfowl. I desperately wanted to photograph these birds; as a birder, it was crucial to showcase my skills and identity, but they remained elusive, deeply hidden on the slopes. I had to admit during this trip that I had much to learn!

At the lodge, illuminated fig trees allowed me to observe how large fruit bats hovered like kestrels in front of each fruit, "hovering" to check ripeness. Ripe fruits disappeared quickly under their wings, a scene reminiscent of a horror movie.

It's worth mentioning that the fish, a type of grouper called "Meru," at Casper Lodge is highly recommended. Unfortunately, large screens seemed to be a hallmark of quality in Angolan establishments. Perhaps it was due to football, but the loud flickering was unbearable—it seemed to bother only me, the *difficult German*.

Early one morning, to the amusement of bystanders, I drove the wrong way into Lubango's one-way streets. I then nervously turned left, straight into oncoming traffic. There was laughter and shouting, countless waving arms, and smiling faces... I quickly turned around in the middle of the highway. A policeman approached, and I braced for trouble, but he simply drove by—typical here, I suppose.

The Leba Pass... it eventually ends up on every postcard! For miles, the road winds deep into southwestern Angola. At the viewpoint, I witnessed a prematurely blood-red sunset in the smoky haze, accompanied by the rumble, roar, and honking of a gigantic living street snake winding through the pass. Carp's Tit, Brubru, and the familiar Dark-capped Bulbul were still photographable, although it grew too dark for the Northern Fiscal and another Angola Cave-Chat.

The next day, I took ample time to experience the pass myself, wondering when the missing guardrail, behind which the drop felt like a thousand meters, would be replaced.

"Mangueiras," the area below the pass, is where I found local birding guides like "Nelson." Initially, one guide turned into three, who benefited more from my knowledge than I did from theirs. However, their company was enjoyable, and they spotted birds better than I could, navigating the numerous "tracks" with expertise. Despite the language barrier—they speaking Portuguese and me English—we had a great time together.

The dialogue unfolded like this:

Them: "Orioooooole...."

Me: "No! Shrike! Grey-headed Shrike!"

Cue the book, the pointing finger, and the great enlightenment.

Them: "Waxbill"

Me: "I want Angola Waxbill."

Them: "Si, si, si, Angola Waxbill."

Me: "No, this is a Common Waxbill."

More of the same followed.

From June onward, a smoky haze blankets Africa. If Greta Thunberg knew the extent of burning and environmental disregard here, she might argue that one Friday a week isn't enough.

Departing early from Lubango, the sun rose like a fiery orb ahead, obscured by the smoky haze of human activity. Against this backlight, a vivid scene unfolded: children, dogs, pigs, chickens, women balancing large bundles atop their heads, and countless mopeds weaving through. The scene was a chaotic harmony typical of Africa, but visibility soon dwindled as I navigated through the haze.

Ahead, an ancient truck, likely past its prime by a decade, veered sharply to avoid a massive pothole, causing a sudden halt. A queue of cars and motorcycles quickly formed behind me. It became evident when girls ran to the driver's cab that a delay was underway. To my disbelief, the driver proceeded to make over a hundred vehicles wait while he bought oranges and bananas roadside. As the first peel flew out the window, the rickety truck lurched forward, unperturbed by the interruption. It seemed an inconvenience to none but me; waiting, especially for women, is a common facet of African life.

I had a meeting with Antonio Martins in Huambo, followed by plans to reach Namba, home to a pristine Afro-Montane forest. Progress was slow due to poor roads and ongoing Chinese construction projects. Lost in Huambo, our arrival in Namba had to be clandestine, requiring permission from the local chief woman for our camp setup.

Antonio's gifts of pangas (machetes) and provisions won favour with the chief, allowing us to camp on a scorched field. Antonio advised that camping where fires had already burned was safer—better than risking an unexpected blaze while asleep.

After four whiskeys, our animated discussions, stocked for the occasion, shifted to the notorious nightly winds, described with some understatement. These gusts didn't breeze gently but pummeled my tent in unpredictable bursts, thwarting any hope of sleep.

Our early departure plans, starting with coffee brewing, were disrupted by tardy guides. After independent searches for Swierstra's Francolin, they eventually arrived, and we ventured into granite gorges cloaked in dense forest.

The landscape evoked memories of Namibia's impressive Erongo, though here the granite was dark, almost black, and the valleys lush with woodland. Amid calls of Schalow's Turacos, I savored sightings of various waxbill species, including the elusive Angola Waxbill. The persistently out-of-reach Swierstra's Francolin largely eluded me on this trip—perhaps, after all, I'm not Superman.

The valley view was breathtaking. I spent two tranquil hours in the forest, birds coming to me as I waited. Black-headed Oriole, Miombo Tit, Green-capped Eremomela, and even the Angola Cave-Chat graced my contemplative spot. Antonio enlightened me on botany, collecting specimens for his herbarium, and by noon, we returned to camp—wearied and dust-covered. I had my fill and yearned to move on; the wind whispered already, birdwatching seemed futile, and my wanderlust grew.

I craved a grill session with meat from Namibia, but plans fell apart. Locals were to provide firewood for what I envisioned as a delightful barbecue evening. Instead, I found inadequate branches and locals huddled around a smoky bush fire at my pit, souring my mood.

Despite rampant felling of ancestral shade trees and wanton burning of dry forests and steppes, locals seem to lack the art of a "good fire." Such a fire burns cleanly, warms without smoke-stained clothes, and yields perfect coals for grilling steaks, vegetables, and chicken. Alas, in Africa, smoky fires persist, maintained small and constant while everyone endures the smoke. Wood is added from the side to keep it going, touted as efficient wood conservation. Let the debate begin!

Fed up, I persuaded Antonio to head to Kumbira. Ever the agreeable companion, he concurred. We abandoned our charred camp, donated the meat, and rolled up our bedrolls, admiring a small Green-backed Woodpecker as we departed.

During travel preparations, my friend Steve recommended lodging near Kumbira—the Fazenda Rio Uiri (Portuguese for farm). Despite minimal ventilation and no running warm water, I found the place charming. Antonio and I got along famously, candidly discussing Angola's complexities—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Our romance with Africa has been tempered by harsh realities.

In Kumbira, Antonio introduced me to the high-elevation forest. En route, I admired a beautifully blooming tree, only to be corrected—it was a "horrible exotic" shading coffee plantations and spreading like a pest in Angola's forests: *Inga affinis* or similar *Inga edulis*. Alongside, invasive *Ageratum conyzoides* and *Chromolaena odorata* almost thwarted me, frustratingly crawling through dense underbrush, longing for machete-wielding aides.

A target bird awaited—the Gabela Bushshrike. I delighted in Red-crested Turacos in majestic tree canopies, though photography proved impossible. Despite interruptions—washerwomen's shouts—a Yellow-billed Barbet salvaged the mood, followed by a barely visible Yellow-throated Nicator call.

You can listen to it here if interested: [[Yellow-throated Nicator](#)]

I encountered three Gabela Bushshrikes, or rather heard them deep within the forest. Describing this experience is impossible; once off the beaten path, I battled through thick, overgrown underbrush, stifled by rising heat. The elusive bird called out just ahead, tantalisingly close but forever hidden. After patiently waiting for half an hour, it briefly emerged before vanishing again, leaving me frustrated. My quest for good photographs suffered a setback when I stumbled, my lens coated in dirt. A brief lift in spirits came when an Angola Batis caught my attention, though my camera failed to focus properly. Nonetheless, today's lifers came thick and fast, a refreshing reward akin to the freshly squeezed pineapple juice at our lodge. Antonio gathered leaves and eventually asked if I was ready to depart. I was, and we braved the bumpy return journey.

The owner of Fazenda Rio Uiri, a diligent farmer, alongside his industrious wife, provided a quintessential Angolan experience. The farm boasted everything: large-scale coffee drying at the sports field, stables bustling with poultry and pigs, fruit-laden trees lining pathways, and accommodations for visitors like us. The restaurant, a spacious hall with round tables, showcased numerous intriguing items I wished to purchase, though carrying them was impractical. Curiosity led me to sample a real cocoa bean, resulting in a delightful piece of homemade chocolate served on a chilled plate. Its unmatched flavour left me speechless. When I attempted to buy some, I was regretfully informed in broken English, "No, not possible," leaving me bewildered.

The journey to Camonde wound through stunning, densely vegetated mountain landscapes punctuated by swift-flowing rivers. I paused often to observe and photograph, though the road beckoned, a constant "unfortunately further," regretting not lingering longer in places where more birds awaited. I had hoped to visit the von Kroszig brothers' farm but time constraints foiled my plans, a lapse in my otherwise meticulous planning that I deeply regretted.

In Cambambe, I was intrigued by the slave fort along the Kwanza River, likely constructed by Portuguese colonists in 1604 to hold captured slaves en route to the Americas. Today, a form of "slave tourism" is to be found: Arriving at Calandula, I encountered two large, guarded buses outside the Pousada (Inn). Passing numerous police, I engaged an American tourist, discovering some were descendants of the earliest slaves shipped to America. Despite receiving "new" names, detailed records documented each slave's sale, origin, and value. For reconciliation, this visit seemed a diplomatic affair, attended by "very important people," leaving a somewhat less profound impression on me.

Visiting the fort proved challenging due to its proximity to a restricted area near a hydroelectric plant. I secured access by bribing a key security guard with 10,000 Kwanza. However, photographing the numerous displayed army-tanks led to complications and a swift denial.

En route to Cambonde, I ventured into Tombinga forest, reputed among birding circles for its avian diversity. Noon proved a dismal birding hour, as the trees remained eerily silent. Children accompanied me through the forest, scaling trees with effortless grace. Near my car loomed a colossal Kapok tree, *Ceiba pentandra*, so immense that it could encircle my son's classmates holding hands twenty times over. An elderly man approached and began hacking at the tree, targeting one of its supporting limbs. Incensed, I confronted him, emphasising the tree's sacred stature and his actions' ecological impact. In four months, I feared hearing its collapse, yet another casualty in the relentless deforestation for charcoal.

The incident left me so riled up that evening called for a double whiskey, exacerbated by thoughts on justifying such environmental exploitation. In Europe, bridges are built for toads, yet such reports likely print on paper sourced from these very forests. Another whiskey and "oë noord fok voort," as the Afrikaner says—press on and stay resilient.

The hotel in Cambonde, once grand, had seen better days. Miss Catia, charming and hospitable, managed amidst the challenges posed by translation apps. Her father's once-thriving trading station sold coffee, hinting at the area's former glory. A solitary toad found solace in the dwindling pool, while walls peeled, revealing layers of past paint jobs. Despite the worn mattress, which left my back aching, Miss Catia treated me to a sumptuous meal as her sole guest. Her matronly kitchen help echoed her warmth. Awake at 4 a.m., I brewed coffee on my stove before heading to Cambonde Forest.

Though portions were being cleared, the coffee plantation owner kindly allowed me access to the "Virgin Forest." There, I marvelled at Black-and-White Casqued Hornbills, Great Blue Turacos, Blue Malkoha, and even a troop of Red-tailed Monkeys (*Cercopithecus ascanius*). Later, I sadly encountered one of these monkeys as "bushmeat" for sale, its tail threaded through a throat hole for carrying. I felt nauseated, turning away from the reality. "Bushmeat" options on the menu included rats, mice, muskrats, bats, other monkey species, and various tree squirrels—instead of more whiskey to stomach these sights a sobering reminder that carrot juice from Namibia proved the wiser choice to carry on.

I appreciated that, amid the clearing, the largest trees remained untouched, a testament to intelligent farming practices. Buying coffee from such plantations seemed logical—a label advocating for this practice would be fitting...

Antonio suggested exploring the forest across the road, a decision I welcomed. Free from the cacophony of chainsaws, I savored the sounds of the forest, encountering Palm-nut Vultures, Red-necked Buzzards, Woodland Kingfishers, Pied Hornbills, and other captivating birds.

Back on my farm in Namibia, concerns began to surface, prompting me to consider shortening my time in Angola and giving my workers a push. Leaving Cambonde for Calandula, I skipped the obligatory visit to Pedras Negras, known as Black Rock in English. Having already marvelled at beautiful monoliths and granite intrusions amidst stunning landscapes, I was less drawn to Pedras Negras, reportedly overrun by overlanders. Later, I heard it could be uncomfortably crowded, so I likely didn't miss much. You've got to know me to love me... hopefully.

The Calandula Falls rival the grandeur of Victoria Falls. Despite the steep cost, the room at Pousada de Calandula was modern and pleasant. Observing the area's lush, less burnt natural flora on the journey here, I opted for a three-night stay, a decision that proved wise as I explored the Miombo Forest at Kinjila. Despite the bumpy drive and time required, I visited twice. Kinjila hosts a dense riverine forest, Miombo woodland, and grasslands. Recently "rediscovered" here, the White-headed Robin-Chat

delighted as a rarity. Playing its call briefly yielded two brief but wonderful sightings. Though I managed only two good photos, watching them flit about brought joy. I also encountered a Square-tailed Drongo, often dismissed as common. With only the Fork-tailed Drongo in Namibia, observing its different behaviour, preferred habitats, and hunting techniques fascinated me. Later, I realised that this "less spectacular" sighting still brought immense enjoyment.

Unexpectedly, in the riverine forest along a small river, I enjoyed a good view and photo opportunity of a Blue Malkoha and a Red-crested Turaco. The continuous call of the White-spotted Flufftail nearly allowed a photograph, foiled only by the bird's shyness. The Grey-winged Robin-Chat appeared repeatedly in the dark undergrowth, but proved too quick and elusive for me to take a good shot of it.

Adjacent Miombo forest—stop, what exactly is Miombo? Miombo is a familiar term in Africa, akin to desert, savanna, or forest, describing broad-leaved dry forests or woodlands on Kalahari sands. For those curious, Miombo primarily comprises two tree species, *Brachystegia spiciformis* and *Julbernardia paniculata*. Personally, I favour the "Msasa" for its striking pods. Google it, and you'll understand :-)

In this Miombo, I spotted a Pale-billed Hornbill, a Yellow-bellied Hyliota feeding on caterpillars, three charming Anchieta's Barbets, and discovered the nest of a female Western Violet-backed Sunbird. A small pouch woven of spider webs and camouflaged with dry leaves, finding and photographing it proved a challenge. Notably, these nectar-feeding birds display plain gray females with striking violet tails! My trio of guides grew impatient—accustomed to hurried birders unlike myself, who prefer a slower pace with time for photography. It rarely aligns perfectly, but I don't mind. I often forget to "log" birds, a small regret in hindsight.

I attempted birdwatching at the Calandula falls in the spray forest, but the "guides," hopeful for generous tips, proved too enthusiastic. Initially accompanied by one gentleman, tolerable save for his strong odour, I manoeuvred to avoid his cloud of smoke and sweat by staying upwind. Their numbers swelled to five or six, vying for leadership, tugging at my sleeve to point out familiar birds. I wondered if they assumed I'd find joy in every Dark-capped Bulbul. Besides the Slender-billed Bulbul, the whole expedition here proved a disappointment.

At sunset, herons and cormorants circled through the misty spray. Their antics, possibly for amusement, puzzled me. Cuca beer in Angola surprisingly tasted decent, contrary to my expectations. South Africans may debate beer brewing, but Angolans rival German beer quite well.

Departing Calandula early to evade numerous potholes, I encountered an unexpected obstacle—a thick, black line stretched across the road. My grandfather had spoken of Angola's wandering ants, widely respected by humans and animals alike. Convenient when crossing through homes, they deterred pests like mice and cockroaches... These were likely *Dorylus* ants.

Today felt like a nod to my grandfather! He once described his time at Nikolaus von Larisch's Canzele plantation, journeying through Camabatela and Quiculungo, where he spent two years. With Antonio's help, I retraced his steps.

Quiculungo felt like driving through a living museum. It was evident that it once thrived. Now resembling a ghost town with bustling inhabitants, its old colonial buildings stood abandoned, paint peeling to reveal echoes of happier times. A wooden scooter-wielding child zoomed past. A weathered Catholic cathedral yearned for paint and plaster, possibly struggling for upkeep. I couldn't confirm, lacking Portuguese. Locals built with sun-dried sandstone or red clay bricks—humble, yet sturdier than corrugated iron.

Once-shaded paths my grandfather described as a "forest tunnel" were now overgrown. Forest remnants dotted hillsides, amid valleys teeming with bananas, oil palms, and cassava—locally known as manioc, abundant and resilient.

Cassava, from the poisonous *Euphorbiaceae* family, requires meticulous processing to remove cyanide. After harvesting, tubers are cleaned, grated, and fermented under pressure in jute sacks. The resulting white pulp dries outdoors—often on asphalt or makeshift tables—its fermenting odour pungent and lingering. I yearned to learn more, but language barriers hindered my inquiries.

Buying roadside bananas proved a lesson—stick to smaller vendors. In Uganda, I learned to distinguish between "food" and "fruit" bananas; I prefer the latter. Road conditions were treacherous! Deep ruts from the last rainy season threatened disaster. From Quiculungo to Bolongongo, progress was slow, punctuated by stops to admire birds.

Canzele, a recognisable coffee farm, featured derelict houses overtaken by nature. A watchtower hinted at stricter times; a veranda overlooked the forest, suggesting post-work tranquility. Numerous papayas lay discarded, seemingly unwanted. The overseer tried to shoo me away, but after sharing two Cuca beers, we forged an unexpected camaraderie. A grunting pig, a biting mosquito, and fogged glasses accompanied my lunch—passion fruit and papaya slurped with my Leatherman. Another Cuca for my newfound friend, then I sought birds, losing to thick undergrowth stumbling back to the car and driving to Uige.

En route, I intended to honour Camabatela through my grandfather's eyes, but romance eluded me. Camabatela teemed with chaotic traffic and lively locals—its cathedral imposing. Onward, without sentiment!

Uige proved a nightmare! The city epitomised chaos. Spotting my hotel, road closures thwarted my approach. An irate policeman guarded orange cones, directing me away. Circumnavigating, I navigated through a throng of mopeds, limousines, dilapidated cars, and off-roaders, struggling to orient myself. Eventually, I found parking, questioning its safety. Reassured by the receptionist of ample security, my car remained untouched despite the city's raucous exterior.

The hotel, despite its noisy surroundings, proved adequate. Good food and hot water, though drainage was faulty. Nonetheless, it sufficed. Outside, the city's sole ATM, or so it seemed, attracted a dense crowd of at least fifty. At night, a woman's scream pierced the air, followed by anguished wails echoing through Uige's streets.

Setting off at 4:00 AM for birdwatching in the forests, I found only thirty people left at the ATM. I still wonder what happened to that woman. Antonio had recommended a forest area that turned out to be a disappointment. Dense fog blanketed the area until noon. One guide turned into four, of a rougher, more primitive nature. After a brief attempt to follow the foul-smelling group into the forest, where they started smoking some awful weed, I promptly turned back!

Children brought me a bird's nest they had taken from a tree and presented it to me. I wasn't angry or sad... just disheartened and empty. I shook my head and asked, "Why do you do this? Why do you allow this?" Of course, they didn't understand me. One of the men crushed two chicks in his fingers, much to the children's amusement, and carelessly threw the others to the ground. Without a word, I got into my car and drove away... my mood was no longer productive, and I sought connection with like-minded people by turning on my phone.

Stefan van Wyk, a conservationist and Angola expert who runs the most renowned safari company in Angola, swiftly provided me with alternatives. Within hours, I found myself in paradise, surrounded by Red-fronted Parrots and countless opportunities for birdwatching. Among them were Rufous Flycatcher-Thrush, Speckled Tinkerbird, Yellow-browed Camaroptera, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, the exquisite

Superb Sunbird, various hornbills, the impressive Great Blue Turaco, and with identification help from my colleague, super birder, and Africa expert Volker Sthamer, a female Purple-throated Cuckooshrike. Here's to communication... when you have network coverage!

The next morning, I set off again very early, around 3:30 AM, heading to Santa Amboleia in search of the Gabela Helmetshrike, also known as the Angola Helmetshrike. A woman offered to guide me and led me on a rather long walk into the dry forest. Along the way, a few naked-neck chickens, also called Turkeys, roamed about... an odd sight.

The kind lady indeed showed me the perfect habitat for these spectacular birds, and soon I captured many photos of them. Besides the Gabela Helmetshrike, another endemic species, the Red-backed Mousebird, also appeared wonderfully close by. Everything felt better here—birds were less skittish, locals were friendlier toward wildlife, or perhaps it just felt that way. I gave the lady a Leaflove Safari T-shirt and happily paid for the wonderful tour. I get along better with women... just kidding.

I had hoped to visit Wolfram Brock, but due to his recent illness and the lengthy drive through Luanda, I opted for the eastern bypass route around the city and headed straight to Cabo Ledo.

Luanda is immense! Over seven million people! On the bypass road, I had to drive fast and carefully—fast to endure the horrendous drive swiftly, and careful to navigate the chaotic traffic safely. Along the way, I passed some gigantic Chinatowns... oh Africa, what will become of you?

Originally planning to overnight at the golf course and explore the bird habitats there, I decided instead to catch some waves and head home early... I didn't want my workers getting too used to the boss being away.

Arriving early at Carpe Diem in Cabo Ledo, I found paradise! There's no other way to describe it. The sea, palm trees, beautiful sandstone cliffs, and tranquil atmosphere were exhilarating. The waiter brought me freshly squeezed pineapple juice, which I absolutely adore.

The following day, I surfed at "The Point," enjoying the warm waters and riding wave after wave... that was the life! I also made a new friend, a stockbroker from Israel named Salomon. I showed Salomon where to position his surfboard and how to paddle with the line of energy, and he caught, as he put it, "the wave of my life." Salomon came up to me on the shore and gave me dates and nuts from Israel, "for energy." He was very kind, and we stay in touch.

My friend Steve Braine suggested driving through Kissama Park and birdwatching in the riparian forests along the Kwanza River near Muxima. Unfortunately, my GPS led me past a military base. Initially, it wasn't an issue as I shared the road with mopeds and old vehicles. If only no bird had crossed my path, if only no bee-eater had swooped for insects. I halted and followed the birds.

A military vehicle pulled over, voices raised. Initially, I thought my car was obstructing, but the soldiers suspected a freshly caught spy — me.

I kept repeating "Desculpa," "meu Touristica," and other improvised Portuguese phrases, trying to explain myself. Soon, a stern soldier with an AK-47 sat beside me, and we followed the convoy ahead to the heart of their operation. Uniformed figures surrounded me. A Land Cruiser stopped; a white American soldier inquired but rolled up his window and drove off when I sought help and translation. I was left to my own thoughts...

Their accusations included:

- My soldier-like appearance and haircut.
- Wearing military-like cargo pants.

- A GPS with a rubber casing, mistaken for military equipment.
- My large camera deemed unsuitable for a tourist.
- A vehicle outfitted for covert operations.
- A drone in my backseat, suspecting espionage.

Finally, a young soldier saluted his commander and greeted me warmly. When I spoke English in relief, he cautioned me to speak only when asked... oh boy.

I was escorted to an interrogation room. As I explained myself, they scrutinised my camera. Claiming bird photography, one soldier accused me of snapping distant planes, challenging his superior's account. They demanded to see nonexistent photos.

Fear and unease gripped me—a sensation I'd never known on my travels. Eventually, I mentioned being invited as a tourism ambassador, not entirely untrue given the president's promotion of tourism and eased visa rules.

The commander demanded to know my sponsor. I coyly cited government invitation without names. Gradually, this seemed to lose significance. They discussed a protocol to release me from the "restricted zone," eventually opting for a friendly escort out. At the exit, I discreetly paid the senior soldier, indifferent to the cost, just relieved to leave after a ruined morning.

I grabbed my surfboard and paddled to Cabo Ledo's Point. After a three-hour surf, the incident sank in. That evening, I recounted it to a pale-faced waiter, who understood well, and he brought me an unsolicited triple whiskey. I downed it and headed to bed.

At 3:00 AM, I packed decisively: "I'm going home, and nothing, not even a bird, will stop me." After 1300 km and crossing the border, exhaustion claimed me at 11:30 PM at Namibia's Protea Hotel in Ondangwa.

Conclusion: I embarked on this trip to offer guests something new and exciting. An ideal safari flows with memorable moments daily. Regrettably, Angola isn't yet ready to meet these expectations. For now, we'll focus on Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

It was an unforgettable experience, though!