

# A Guide to Birdwatching in the Okavango Delta:

## Species You Can Spot from the Island Safari Lodge

Bird-watching enthusiasts welcome! The Okavango Delta should be at the top of your list to document the incredibly diverse species of birds and fowl at our disposal. This sprawling paradise of wetlands is a haven for over 500 bird species, offering you the best birding experience in the world. Whether you're a seasoned twitcher or a curious beginner, there's always something to marvel at in the skies, trees, and waters of the Delta.

With Island Safari Lodge being the gateway to the many different biomes in Botswana, you can explore all kinds of birdlife from your veranda. Located right on the Thamalakane River, the lodge provides incredible opportunities from the comfort of your chalet or the restaurant. With the ancient sprawling canopies above, smaller birdlife tends to roost in the hollow trunks of our ancient trees. Keep your camera close because we have had sightings of Lilac Breasted Rollers, Hoopoes, and other gorgeous feathered friends nesting in our trees.

So, grab your binoculars and field guide, because here's what to expect on a birdwatching adventure in the Okavango Delta, with Island Safari Lodge as your home base.

### 1. African Fish Eagle

Known as the majestic "voice of Africa", the African Fishing Eagle has a distinctive call that reverberates throughout the Delta. With its gleaming white head and dark chestnut body, this magnificent bird of prey is often seen perched on high branches near water sources, scouring the rivers for its next meal. Island Safari Lodge offers a gateway to the depths of the Delta. Choose a Mokoro day trip, and we will drive you up into the wetlands to better enjoy your river birding experience.

Best time to spot: Year-round, especially in the mornings when they're actively hunting for fish along the river.

Spot them from the riverside deck at Island Safari Lodge or on a boat safari up the Thamalakane River and adjoining Delta.

## 2. Malachite Kingfisher

This tiny jewel-coloured bird is a must-see for any avid birdwatcher. With its bright orange and blue feathers catching the light as it dives into the dark waters, it's hard to miss if you know what you are looking for. You will often see it resting on stems of reeds or hovering intently over the water's surface, before plunging into the depths, using its long beak to snatch up its prey.

Best time to spot: Year-round, though they're more active during the wetter months (November to April).

Spot them from the lodge's waterfront areas, where they love to fish. Keep an eye on reeds and riverbanks.

## 3. Lilac-breasted Roller

This beautiful little bird is a true prima donna, its vivid mix of pinks, blues and purples show off its sunrise-like plumage, they are known for their acrobatic flight patterns, especially when they dive for their prey: tiny insects, or when they dance in the sky to attract a mate.

Best time to spot: Spring to summer (September to April), though they can be seen year-round.

Spot them from the open grounds of Island Safari Lodge, especially in trees or along paths where they hunt for insects.

## 4. African Jacana

The "Jesus bird" gives these fowl a fun nom de plume for its ability to walk on water (well, on lily pads). The African Jacana is an interesting bird, with its long, wide toes, which waders can spread their surface pressure and allow them to trot confidently on the lily pads along the sides of rivers. Often, when you see cute and fluffy babies, they are accompanied by their dad or hiding under his wings. So if you see an African Jacana with a few extra legs, don't freak out! What you are really seeing is a great dad protecting his children.

Best time to spot: During the wet season (November to March) when the water levels are high.

Spot them from the Delta's channels during a mokoro ride arranged by Island Safari Lodge.

## 5. Pel's Fishing Owl

This elusive species of owl is highly sought-after as being the “holy grail” for bird enthusiasts. The Pel's Fishing Owl is a large, tawny bird that roosts in thick forests and hunts at night, you might hear their hauntingly beautiful call just before you go to bed at night and photographing them is a serious bragging right for any birdwatcher!

Best time to spot: Year-round, but sightings are rare, so patience is key.

Spotting them from the lodge can organise night drives or special bird-watching excursions to increase your chances.

## 6. White-fronted Bee-eater

With their bright green bodies, blue bee-hinds and blood-red throats, the White-fronted Bee-eaters are not only gorgeous little birds but also incredibly spectacular to watch as they catch bees and insects mid-flight.

Best time to spot: During the warmer months (September to April), when insects are plentiful.

Spot them from the sandy banks along the river, where they often nest in colonies. They're frequent visitors to the lodge's surrounding areas.

## 7. Yellow-billed Stork

Large and striking, these wading birds catch your attention from kilometres away with their bright yellow beaks and black-tipped wings. They are a common sight in the Delta's wetlands as they wade in the shallow waters catching frogs, fish, and crustaceans.

Best time to spot: Wet season (November to March), when the floodplains are teeming with life.

Spot them from the edges of the Delta on a boat safari or from Island Safari Lodge's riverside perch.

## 8. Coppery-tailed Coucal

Island Safari Lodge is all but overrun with these mysterious and fascinating birds. The Coppery-tailed Coucal's chestnut wings and bubbling call can be heard from our facilities; they love to hide in dense vegetation near water.

Best time to spot: Year-round, but they are more vocal during the breeding season (October to March).

Spot them from the dense thickets near Island Safari Lodge, particularly around the riverbank.

## 9. Giant Kingfisher

The largest African kingfisher can often be seen perched on branches or docks, waiting patiently for fish to enter its sight. Its black and white speckled body and tawny tummy don't make it the prettiest kingfisher in Botswana, but its sheer size makes it quite a sight, especially if you have already seen some of the smaller kingfishers.

Best time to spot: Year-round, especially during the dry season when water levels are lower, and fish are easier to catch.

Spot them from the riverside or while on a boat safari offered by Island Safari Lodge.

## 10. Red-billed Oxpecker

This bird is often associated with large animals like buffalo and giraffes. The Red-billed Oxpecker is known to eat ticks and parasites off the backs of these large roaming mammals.

The best time to spot: Year-round.

Spot them from: Keep an eye out during game drives arranged by Island Safari Lodge, especially if you encounter a herd of buffalo.

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### Birdwatching Seasons in the Okavango Delta

- Wet Season (November to April): The Delta is lush and alive with migratory birds, including the famous African Skimmer and various waders. This is the best time for birders looking to see species in their breeding plumage.

- Dry Season (May to October): As water levels drop, birds become more concentrated around permanent water sources. While the migratory species leave, the resident birds offer excellent viewing opportunities, especially raptors and waterbirds.

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## Why Island Safari Lodge is a Birdwatcher's Dream

With its idyllic location, Island Safari Lodge is the gateway to the Okavango Delta, situated right on the cusp between the Delta and the Kalahari, it is perfectly situated for birdwatching. With the large, ancient trees surrounding the restaurants and the majority of the Lodge, we can see why birds love to make their homes in this area. Be sure to bring your binoculars and your cameras when you come and stay with us because the birdlife living all around you is a once-in-a-lifetime experience to behold. The lodge's knowledgeable guides can also tailor bird-watching excursions, ensuring you have the best chance to spot both common and elusive species.

So, pack your binoculars, book your stay at Island Safari Lodge, and prepare for a birdwatching trip you'll never forget in the heart of the Okavango Delta!