

## REVIEW: Zeiss Conquest Gavia 85 T spotting scope

I'm a big fan of Zeiss's Conquest binoculars, which score highly in terms of quality and value for money (see *African Birdlife* 1(3): 48-52), so it was with some anticipation that I received a Conquest Gavia 85 T spotting scope to review. It arrived in a massive box, which also included Zeiss's professional tripod, a nice touch to ensure that the reviewer got the most from the scope. The carbon-fibre tripod is impressive, but I found the head a bit fiddly and would probably couple it with a Manfrotto fluid head.

Zeiss has produced a variety of scopes over the past decade, including some innovative models with integrated cameras. However, it has simplified its offerings and the range now includes the compact Dialyt 18-45x spotting scope with a 65mm objective and old-style pull-out design, targeted mainly at hikers; the mid-level Conquest Gavia, offering value for money; and the much-anticipated Victory Harpia scopes, due for release early this year.

As its designation suggests, the Conquest Gavia has an 85mm objective. With improvements in glass and lens coatings over the past decade, many birders have moved to smaller and lighter scopes with 65mm or 77mm objective lenses, but these models do suffer somewhat in low-light conditions. Zeiss has dropped its small 65mm Diascope model, and the 85mm objective is now the entry level for its standard spotting scopes. The big HD objective of the Gavia lets in lots of light, resulting in crisp, true-to-life images. At about 1.7 kilograms, it is heavier than the smaller 65mm or 77mm scopes on the market, but its magnesium alloy body makes it light for an 85mm objective scope.

As you would expect from Zeiss, the build quality and finish are of a high standard. Both the eyepiece and the objective covers are solidly constructed and well designed not to fall off. The scope is nitrogen filled and waterproof and the entire body is protected by thick rubber armour, making it feel as rugged

as its Conquest binocular cousins. At just over three metres, its minimum focus distance out-performs all other top-end scopes with objective lenses greater than 80mm, but you are seldom likely to focus this close unless you're into butterflies or dragonflies.

The Gavia resembles Swarovski's legendary ATS 80 scope and also has a mounting foot that doubles as a Manfrotto quick-release plate. It only comes with a 45-degree offset eyepiece and, although this is removable, currently the only eyepiece available is the 30-60x zoom. I compared its performance with a Kowa TSN 773 with a 25-60x wide zoom, and a Swarovski ATS 80 with a 20-60x zoom and a fixed 30x wide-angle eyepiece. Despite its lower price tag, the image quality of the Conquest is comparable. However, its field of view is rather narrow, especially given its relatively high minimum magnification, and birders who are used to a wide-angle eyepiece will doubtless find this a distinct disadvantage.

Although better than my 20-60x Swarovski at 30x, the field of view is narrower than the same lens at 20x and much worse than my preferred fixed 30x wide angle (see table). It is outperformed by Kowa's 25-60x wide-angle zoom, which is not that much more expensive when coupled with a 77mm body. A minor annoyance was that the focus mechanism goes the 'wrong' way (most binoculars and scopes turn clockwise to focus on more distant items, but this



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scope operates the other way). That said, the focus is achieved through a large, central barrel ring, like on a Swarovski scope, that is easy to use.

Overall, the Conquest Gavia offers a good all-round scope with superior build quality at a competitive price. However, if budget isn't an issue, I'd wait to see Zeiss's new Victory Harpia scopes: the 85mm boasts a 22-65x zoom that Zeiss reports has an incredible 63-metre field of view at 1000 metres, almost double the Conquest Gavia's 33 metres. There's also a 95mm objective model with a 23-70x zoom, which has a field of view that is nearly as impressive (59 metres).

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Model	Maximum field of view (metres at 1000 m)
Zeiss Conquest Gavia 30-60x	33 m
Swarovski 20-60x	36 m
Kowa 20-60x	38 m
Leica 25-50x wide angle	41 m
Swarovski and Kowa 30x wide angle	42 m
Swarovski 25-50x wide angle	42 m
Kowa 25-60x wide angle	42 m
Zeiss Victory Harpia 95 23-70x	59 m
Zeiss Victory Harpia 85 22-65x	63 m