

Ethiopia

22nd November – 8 December 2014

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Introduction

We had talked about an Ethiopian trip for a number of years and following a great slide show from David Fisher at our annual Christmas get together, we reached a provisional agreement to sort out a trip.

In addition to the obvious appeal of a host of Horn of Africa endemic birds, we were keen to catch up with the critically endangered **Ethiopian Wolf** and the somewhat strange looking **Gelada Baboon**.

MCP set about sorting the logistics out and made contact with Attila Steiner at [Ecotours Wildlife Holidays](#). Our main stipulation was that we wanted to see as many of the endemics and near endemics as possible, including a trip north of Addis Ababa for **Ankober Serin** and **Harwood's Francolin** and a trip to Sof Omar for **Salvadori's Seedeater**. We were not too bothered about the standard of accommodation and were happy to stay at basic hotels if this meant being close to our target birds.

Additionally, due to leave commitments, we asked Attila to try and stick to a 16 day itinerary, although we were aware this would leave us with some tight schedules at a few locations and an extra few days would no doubt have allowed for a more leisurely trip!

We flew direct from Heathrow with Ethiopian Airlines at a cost of £525 return booked through [www.flightcentre.co.uk](#). Unfortunately one of our group had to drop out of the trip the week before due to medical reasons.

Between us, we had undertaken a number of previous sub Saharan Africa visits, with trips to Gambia, Kenya, South Africa and Namibia, so fortunately we were not completely over whelmed by the fabulous number and variety of species.

Visa/Entry

After much debate we decided to purchase our visa on arrival at a cost of \$20. This was pretty much hassle free and the queue was not too bad. We did not seem to take much longer to clear customs than the people who had pre-arranged their visas.

Prior to the trip we had been made aware of a few birders having experienced problems getting their camera gear through customs, due to concerns about them being professional photographers. RMA enquired with the Ethiopian Embassy in London and was advised to send them a list of camera equipment at least 2 weeks before travelling to avoid problems on entry. We did this via Ecotours but as it was, we were waved straight through customs without even a check.

Transport

We travelled in two 4WD vehicles, a Toyota Land Cruiser and a Nissan Patrol. Use of 4WD was essential to reach most of the key sites, and on several occasions we spent all day travelling on unpaved roads, particularly Debre Birhan to Awash and Negele to Yabello. There appeared to be plenty of road upgrading going on with Chinese backing and even on tarmac roads there were regular diversions onto unpaved surfaces. The road from Yabello to Awassa was particularly poor.

The 2 vehicle scenario worked well enough and we were able to communicate via 2 way radios and whilst we saw a few different birds each day, everyone managed to see all the major birds.

Health/Weather

One of the group was quoted £96 for 25 anti-Malarial tablets (Malerone) by Boots. However, it eventually proved possible to purchase the generic alternative from Asda for £25. The usual advice about hat, sun cream and insect repellent applies!

The only really cold location was early morning up on the Sanetti Plateau looking for Ethiopian Wolf. The only rain experienced were two heavy but brief thunderstorms when in Awash National Park.

Only one of our party experienced stomach problems for a few days and we had taken the precaution of obtaining a private prescription for Ciprofloxacin in advance of our trip which helped to ease the issues.

Field Guide/Bird Calls

Birds of the Horn of Africa, 2nd edition was our bible throughout the trip. AB also had the app for Birds of East Africa on his iPhone and this gave access to some bird calls that were useful for Ethiopia. We also used a few calls from the African Bird Sound CD series that we had purchased for Kenya 2007. It should prove possible to download most of the endemic/near endemic calls via www.xeno-canto.org.

Guides

Attila flew out from Hungary to guide our trip. He clearly has an excellent knowledge of the birds of the region, and we are grateful for his efforts in helping us build such a great trip list, particularly those of us who did not have much time to study the field guide before we left the UK!!

Attila was assisted on the ground by local guide Measho Legesse haime2rs@yahoo.com. Measho proved to have a very good knowledge of all the sites visited and knew exactly where to find all our target birds. He also proved to have a sharp eye for spotting birds from a moving vehicle!! Both AB and MCP are now very familiar with the Amharic word for stop!!!

Additionally Measho proved to be a very able fixer and translator on the ground, liaising with hotel and restaurant staff and quickly resolving any minor issues we encountered.

Hotels/Food

Ranged from basic to ok with hot showers a bit hit and miss. We encountered a few power cuts, nothing prolonged, but probably best to take a torch. Food choice was regularly limited, particularly in the Negele area although we ate at several nice restaurants in Awassa and Addis Ababa. We did however decline all offers of Ingera! Only a couple of hotels had Wi-Fi and even then the signal proved unreliable and intermittent, so don't bank on uploading photos to Cloud services whilst travelling around.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1 - 22 Nov - Debre Libanos, Ethio-German Park Hotel
Day 2 - 23 Nov - Debre Birhan, Eva Hotel
Day 3 - 24 Nov - Debre Birhan, Eva Hotel
Day 4 - 25 Nov - Awash NP, Awash Falls Lodge
Day 5 - 26 Nov - Lake Langano, Bekele Molla Hotel
Day 6 - 27 Nov - Wondo Genet, Wabe Shebele Hotel
Day 7 - 28 Nov - Goba, Wabe Shebele Hotel
Day 8 - 29 Nov - Goba, Wabe Shebele Hotel
Day 9 - 30 Nov - Goba, Wabe Shebele Hotel
Day 10 - 1 Dec - Negele, Turaco Hotel
Day 11 - 2 Dec - Negele, Turaco Hotel
Day 12 - 3 Dec - Yabello, Yabello Mobile Hotel
Day 13 - 4 Dec - Yabello, Yabello Mobile Hotel
Day 14 - 5 Dec - Awassa, United Africa Hotel
Day 15 - 6 Dec - Welkite, Jyoka Hotel
Day 16 - 7 Dec - Addis Ababa, KZ Hotel

Day 1 - Addis Ababa to Debre Libanos via Sululta Plains

The drive up to Heathrow the evening before had been uneventful as was our overnight flight out to Addis Ababa. We were greeted upon arrival by people in white suits and an Ebola screening area, and questioned about any visits to West Africa before eventually joining the queue for "Visa on Arrival". We paid our 20 US dollars and after around an hour we had managed to clear customs and meet our guides Attila and Measho in the main airport foyer. The pre-trip concerns about customs and camera gear proved unfounded as we were waved straight through without even screening the bags. First birds of the trip on the grass outside the airport terminal included **Dusky Turtle Dove**, **Pied Crow**, and our first endemic, **White-collared Pigeon** along with an old friend from previous trips to Africa, **Speckled Pigeon**.

After stopping to change some money and buy some provisions we headed off to the Sululta Plains for a pleasant couple of hours birding. The hustle and bustle as we exited Addis Ababa was typical African big city, with large numbers of **Kites** circling overhead.

We quickly started to build the list up, including a few endemics. New birds included the much desired **Blue-winged Goose** and **Wattled Ibis**, **Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher**, **Red-breasted Wheatear**, **Ethiopian Cisticola**, **Black-headed Siskin**,

Mountain Thrush, Groundscraper Thrush, Swainson's Sparrow, Steppe Eagle, Brown-rumped Seedeater and Common Fiscal. Palearctic migrants were also prominent with lots of **Yellow Wagtails, Red-throated Pipit, Whinchat, Chiff Chaff** and **Pied Wheatear.**

After this successful session we headed a few miles down the road for lunch at the Sululta Palace Resort Hotel where in addition to a nice meal we added **Streaky Seedeater** and **White-backed Vulture.**

Following lunch we headed a few miles down the road where we spent some time walking an area with a couple of small pools. We quickly notched up a range of wader species, with birds such as **Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Temminck's Stint, Three-banded Plover, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper** and **Common Sandpiper.** There were plenty of water birds too with **Hottentot Teal, Red-billed Duck** and **Northern Shoveler** being additions. Highlight though of this particular stop was **Abyssinian Longclaw** and we managed some great views of 3 different birds. The next 2 quick stops nearby gave us the endemic **Erlanger Lark,** together with **Black-crowned Crane, Grassland Pipit** and **Isabelline Wheatear.** After that we set off for the drive to Debre Libanos to check into the Ethio German Park Hotel. The hotel itself has some spectacular views across the Rift Valley but we didn't have too long to admire them as we were soon back in our vehicles and on the way to the nearby Debre Libanos Monastery site where we spent an excellent hour or so before dark. The splendid **White-cheeked Turaco** stole the show but the supporting cast included **Ethiopian Boubou, African Goshawk, Montane White-eye, Ruppell's Black Chat, White-rumped Babbler, White-backed Black Tit, Ruppell's Robin Chat, Ethiopian Oriole** and **Brown Woodland Warbler.**

Birds – 106

Mammals – 0

Day 2 - Jemma Valley and Debre Birhan

It was an early morning start for the Jemma Valley and one of the more range restricted birds, **Harwood's Francolin.** Not that we had to set the alarm as the loudspeaker from the nearby Monastery started blaring from well before first light. Whilst racing down the gravel road to the Valley we encountered a pair of **Erckel's Francolins** on the road with chicks. A flyover **White-billed Starling** and **Montagu's Harrier** were other birds seen before we finally arrived at the **Harwood's Francolin** site. It would be somewhat amiss not to mention the stunning views over the Jemma Valley that greeted us. As to the **Francolin,** there was an anxious 15 minutes or so as the birds called from scrub beneath us giving fleeting views. However, with the help of the large group of kids and their various sticks, we managed to pin down a calling bird which eventually wandered out into the open, so relief all round. The supporting cast included **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting** and plenty of **Pied Wheatears.**

On our way back to the nearby local village for breakfast an **Erckel's Francolin** sat on a rock was a welcome grip back for the second vehicle who had missed the earlier sighting. We also managed great views of a roadside **White-billed Starling.** Other roadside birds included **Abyssinian Black Wheatear** and **Black-crowned Tchagra.**

Following a scrambled egg/omelette breakfast we headed back out into the field and spent the late morning and early afternoon down at the bottom of the Jemma Valley. We managed to increase our bird of prey list with **Griffon Vulture**, **Verreaux's Eagle**, **Martial Eagle**, **Fox Kestrel**, **Dark-chanting Goshawk** and **Tawny Eagle**. On the small bird front, **Speckled-fronted Weaver**, **Bush Petronia**, **Mocking Cliff Chat**, **Isabelline Shrike**, **Pied Kingfisher**, **Little Bee-eater**, **Blue-breasted Bee-eater** and **Scarlet-chested Sunbird**, were new for the trip as were **Senegal Thick-knee** and the impressive **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill**. **Ruppell's Black Chat** and **Ethiopian Boubou** put in re-appearances from yesterday and we also caught up with one of our main targets for the trip **Gelada Baboon** with good views of a family party working its way across a cliff face. Other mammals included **Slender Mongoose**, **Grivet Monkey** and **Olive Baboon**. We also spotted our only **Nile Crocodile** of the trip.

By now it was getting rather hot, but we stopped on the way back out a few times to look for the near endemic **White-winged Cliff Chat**. However, we appeared to be out of luck until we were nearly out of the valley when eagle-eyed Measho spotted one from our moving vehicle! Good scope views were had once we had screeched to a halt. Other birds added on the way out included **Hemprich's Hornbill**, **African Hawk Eagle**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Tawny-flanked Prinia** along with a roadside **Gelada Baboon**.

After all that excitement it was time to head back to Lemi for a late afternoon lunch at the same place we had stopped for breakfast this morning. Whilst we ate, one of our drivers headed off to sort the first puncture of the trip.

With the tyre sorted, we commenced the 2 hour drive to Debre Birhan stopping as and when which produced a few more additions namely **Black-winged Lapwing**, **Red-chested Swallow**, **Lanner Falcon**, and a **Tawny Eagle** sat close to the road. Final stop of the day was the Eva Hotel where we arrived just as it was getting dark for our 2 night stay and spent a pointless hour trying to connect to the hotel Wi-Fi.

Birds – 160

Mammals – 5

Day 3 - Ankober & Melka Ghebdu

Another attempt to get the hotel Wi-Fi working failed this morning so in the absence of football scores we had to concentrate on breakfast. After collecting our packed lunches we headed off to look for one of the trickier endemics, **Ankober Serin**. A short while later Measho announced that "we will try by here" and MCP then proceeded to set the World Record for locating tricky range restricted endemics upon arrival on site at just over 0.01 seconds as he spotted 3 birds feeding on the verge a couple of feet away! A somewhat surreal moment as the wheels of our Nissan Patrol had not even stopped moving but nevertheless a very welcome one. We knew this would be our one and only shot at this species and once we had scrambled out of our vehicles we had fabulous prolonged views of several small groups of birds feeding on the rocks either side of the road.

With the main target in the bag we were able to relax and enjoy the stunning views. Two **Lammergeiers** gave excellent views as did a **Verreaux's Eagle** and a **Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk**. **Rock Hyrax** was a new mammal and a troop of **Gelada Baboons** gave distant views on a nearby ridge.

Next on the agenda was another restricted range endemic **Yellow-throated Seedeater**. For this we would need to head into the highlands and through Ankober itself. Once turned off the main road we quickly encountered **Thick-billed Raven** and had further great views of 2 more **Lammergeiers** this time living up to their name "bone breakers". We also had good views of a pair of **African Stonechats**.

After passing through Ankober and some stunning views we pulled the same trick again at Melka Ghebdu stopping and finding a **Yellow-throated Seedeater** as soon as we exited the vehicle, having spotted a roadside **Blue-breasted Bee-eater**. A stop a little further up the road produced **Scarlet-chested Sunbird** and **Green-winged Pytilia**. We then took some time out to eat lunch alongside a slow flowing riverbed where both **Black-chested** and **Brown Snake Eagles** appeared overhead.

With the food out of the way we headed off on a walk down the river bed. **Giant, Malachite, Half-collared** and **Pygmy Kingfishers** increased our **Kingfisher** list whilst other birds of note were **African Firefinch, Eastern Plantain Eater, Cut-throat Finch, Fork-tailed Drongo** and 2 more **Yellow-throated Seedeaters** (MCP).

A pair of **African Hawk Eagles** circled overhead just as we headed off to check another river bed. Here we added **Ruppell's Weaver, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver** and **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah**. The drive back to Debre Birhan produced more spectacular views in the dropping sunlight along with our first group of **Helmeted Guineafowl**.

Back at the hotel we managed to finally connect to the Wi-Fi and at dinner encountered the rather novel idea of being served our main meal the same time as our starter!!

Birds – 196

Mammals – 6

Day 4 - Debre Birhan to Awash NP

Today we headed back along the road through Ankober en route to Awash National Park, having confirmed yesterday that it should be possible to get all the way through to Awash. A roadside stop to look at a **Mocking Cliff Chat** produced a field full of **Oortolan Buntings, Red-throated Pipits** and **Erlanger's Larks**.

For the next couple of hours we slowly made our way back along yesterday's route through Ankober and then out and beyond towards the Awash Plain. It took some great skill on the part of our drivers to get us past a couple of particularly poor stretches of road and proving without doubt that a good all-terrain vehicle was essential for this trip!

We picked up a number of new birds in various stops – **Slender-billed Starling**, **Red-billed Hornbill**, **Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Buff-bellied Warbler**, **White-browed Coucal**, **Yellow-breasted Barbet**, **Long-billed Pipit** and **Common Rock Thrush**. We also had another **Yellow-throated Seedeater**. Strangest sight though was what appeared to be a semi domesticated **Lesser Kudu** on the edge of one of the villages we passed through. Eventually with the worst bits of the road over we dropped onto the Awash Plain where we weaved our way through a Cattle and Camel market for the local Afar people.

Not long after this we managed to find a particularly productive tree during a road side stop which literally teemed with birds - **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah**, **Straw-tailed Whydah**, **Ruppell's Starling**, **Abyssinian Scimitarbill**, **Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit**, **Cardinal Woodpecker**, **African Mourning Dove**, **Little Weaver** and **White-headed Buffalo Weaver**. A further stop gave us good views of **Black-headed Lapwing**.

We then retired for lunch before heading off again towards Awash along gravel tracks, sandy tracks and in some places no tracks at all. We struck a major piece of luck when Measho spotted an **Arabian Bustard** right alongside the track and we had superb views before it walked off into the bush. A lucky moment which would mean we would not need to spend time searching for it later on.

Our next little adventure occurred when we discovered our route had been blocked off by construction work for a new road. After a few enquiries with nearby locals, someone jumped in our vehicle and we set off on a several mile detour through the bush to eventually re-join the track the other side of the unopened new road. A real “Out of Africa” moment which also gave us an encounter with a troop of **Sacred Baboons**.

Late afternoon it was somewhat of a relief to finally re-join a Tarmac road. After a quick discussion we decided to head for the Ali Dege Plains to try for **Somali Ostrich** and further views of **Arabian Bustard**, both of which we duly saw along with a flyover flock of **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** (AB). We also saw a group of the endemic **Soemmering's Gazelle**.

With the light starting to fade we made a quick dash to the wetlands at Bilen Lodge adding **Warthog** and **Salt's Dik Dik** on the way. A short walk around produced **African Grey Flycatcher**, **Pallid Harrier** and **Barred Warbler**. On the way back to the main road we had a few **Plain Nightjars** flying around the car. We also had **Slender-tailed Nightjar** calling strongly in the distance, but they could wait for later in the trip.

After our longest day to date we were all glad to finally reach our accommodation at the Awash Falls Lodge where we had a somewhat atmospheric evening meal around a camp fire.

Birds – 244

Mammals – 13

Day 5 - Awash NP to Rift Valley lakes

An early morning jaunt for 2 hours before breakfast proved very productive, helped by the cooler overcast conditions. We headed off to look for **Bustards** and **Larks**, and were successful in finding a close roadside **Hartlaub's Bustard** and also had good scope views of **Red-winged Lark**. A **Singing Bushlark** was less obliging preferring to perform just in flight. Other birds seen in our drive included **Hadada Ibis**, **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill**, **African Grey Hornbill**, **Red-billed Hornbill**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver**, **Rosy-patched Bush Shrike**, **Desert Cisticola**, **Chestnut-backed Sparrow Weaver**, **Northern White-crowned Shrike**, **Superb Starling** and another near endemic, **Somali Fiscal**. We also had good views of a few perched birds of prey, namely **Lappet-faced Vulture**, **Dark-chanting Goshawk** and **Short-toed Eagle**.

After returning to our lodge for breakfast we packed up and headed back out into Awash NP. It did not take us long to find a pair of **White-bellied Bustards**, our third **Bustard** of the trip. It did however take us a fair bit of searching to pin down a couple of **Gillett's Larks**, but on the plus side, we managed to find a few other birds whilst looking. These included **Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike**, **Grey Wren Warbler**, **Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit** and a familiar friend **Lesser Whitethroat**.

Further down the road, we stopped for good views of **Ashy Cisticola** and then spent some time looking over the spectacular cliffs and gorge at the former lodge where another birding group had claimed a couple of birds thought to be an un-described species of **Cliff Swallow**. We had no joy, but most of the **Hirundines** were high up against the sky so viewing was not ideal. We did however see a few **Ring-necked Doves** and **European Turtle Doves**, along with a large number of **Namaqua Doves**.

A couple of claps of thunder later and we were running to our vehicles before the start of a heavy but brief rain storm. We opted to forgo a full lunch in favour of a quick drink and snack stop to allow more time to look for another localised endemic, **Sombre Rock Chat**.

But first we had a roadside stop alongside Lake Beseka, the first large body of water of the trip. AB was firmly disappointed that there were still no **Gulls** to look at but the trip list continued to build with **Pink-backed Pelican**, **Striated Heron**, **Squacco Heron**, **Ethiopian Swallow** and **Reed Cormorant**. A short distance up the road, amongst the impressive lava stone habitat we quickly found our target, **Sombre Rock Chat**, along with **Blackstart**, **Nile Valley Sunbird**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Striolated Bunting**. With more rain coming in, we jumped back in the vehicles and began the long drive to Lake Langano not arriving until after dark, although we did enjoy the luxury of a brief spell on an empty three lane toll motorway!

We stopped briefly on the way at some pools which held **African Jacana**, **White-faced Whistling Duck**, **Marsh Sandpiper** and large flocks of **Ruff**.

Running out of time we decided to give Lake Ziway a miss and headed straight to our lodge at Lake Langano to try unsuccessfully for **Freckled Nightjar** in the grounds of the Bekele Molla Hotel.

Birds – 289

Mammals – 13

Day 6- Lake Langano to Wondo Genet

This morning we had a very pleasant stroll around the hotel grounds before breakfast. With some excellent light for photography the “Toggers” were kept busy with showy **Rufous-necked Wryneck** and **Blue-breasted Bee-eaters**. Other birds of interest included **Black-winged Lovebird**, **Black-billed Barbet**, **Red-faced Crombec**, **Superb Starling**, **Red-fronted Barbet**, **Little Rock Thrush**, **Boran Cisticola**, **Rattling Cisticola**, and **Slate-coloured Boubou**. At last on the beach we also had some **Gulls**, with both **Black-headed** and **Grey-headed Gull**.

After probably the best breakfast of the trip so far we loaded up our bags and drove a short distance to look at a roosting **Greyish Eagle Owl**. We then spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon birding the woods adjacent to Bishangari Lodge. On the way in we had good views of **Clapperton’s Francolin** and **Northern Carmine Bee-eater** and after putting in the time we eventually saw both our main targets **Narina Trogon** and **Yellow-fronted Parrot**. Other new species included **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**, **Red-headed Weaver**, **African Dusky Flycatcher**, **Green-backed Honeyguide**, **Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike** and a new mammal, **Guereza Colubus Monkey**. We also had further views of **Abyssinian Oriole** and also managed to notch up a trip record 45 children in tow, as the main track through the forest appeared to lead to the local school!

Back on the main road, Measho spotted a **Pygmy Falcon** sat on roadside wires and a quick U-turn later it was on the trip list.

A well-earned lunch break overlooking Lake Langano added our first **Terns** of the trip, with **Gull-billed**, **White-winged Black** and **Whiskered Tern** all feeding offshore. The large **gulls** flying back and fore appeared to be **Heuglin’s Gulls** whilst both **Pink-backed** and **White Pelicans** were flying along the shoreline. After lunch we walked the short distant to a nearby hut where 3 **Slender-tailed Nightjars** were roosting within a few yards of each other.

Final stop of the day was a drive out to the shore of Lake Abiyata where we encountered tens of thousands of **Flamingos**, **Ducks**, **Shorebirds**, **Terns** and a few large **Gulls**. Pick of the waders was a **Lesser Sand Plover**. Other waders included **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Dunlin**, **Avocet**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **Kentish Plover**, **Kittlitz’s Plover**, **Curlew** and large numbers of **Little Stint** and **Ruff**. Also lots of **Northern Shoveler**, along with **Common Crane**, **Pallid Harrier** and **Black-backed Jackal**.

Final excitement of the day was a **Cape Eagle Owl** which flew across the road just before we reached the Wondo Genet Resort Hotel.

Birds – 344

Mammals – 14

Day 7 - Wondo Genet, drive to Goba for Bale Mountains

According to Measho there has been a significant amount of habitat destruction in recent years at Wondo Genet and he was of the view that the area was no longer as productive on the bird front. Nevertheless, we took another early morning stroll and looped up through the forested hillsides and back down to the hotel. First sighting of the morning was the endemic **Menelik's Bushbuck**. Birds were a bit slower than yesterday morning but we still managed to add a few new species. **Banded Barbet** was one of our missing endemics and other additions included **Black and White Mannikin**, **Woodland Kingfisher**, **Black Saw-wing**, and **Pin-tailed Whydah**. There were also a few **White-cheeked Turacos**, **Double-toothed Barbets**, **Bronze Mannikins**, **White-rumped Babblers** and **African Citril Finches** knocking around. We also had very brief views of **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** (PB) along with very good views of **Pygmy Kingfisher**.

Next stop was the forested hillside behind the nearby college where our local guide took us to a **Crowned Eagle** nest. We couldn't find the staked out **Verreaux's Eagle Owl** but did see more **Yellow-fronted Parrots** and **Colobus Monkeys**. At this point we decided to set off on the drive to the Bale Mountains and on the way out of Wondo Genet we stopped for a circling **Long-crested Eagle**.

We took lunch at the Bale Mountain Resort Hotel, where apart from the food we had great views of several **Thick-billed Ravens**.

First stop in the Bale Mountains was for a **Cape Eagle Owl** stakeout in a small hillside canyon. Upon pulling up the nearby settlement emptied of women and children and it took them only a short time to locate a roosting bird and receive their payment for doing so!

Rouget's Rail was the next new endemic on a small roadside pool. Another pool just before the National Park Headquarters held **Abdim's Stork** and after sorting the entrance fees we headed off to look for a roosting **Abyssinian Owl**. The bird was sat in its usual tree and after some good views we tried to locate a nearby **African Wood Owl**. Unfortunately the bird had moved its roost tree due to local building work so ultimately we were unsuccessful. A look around the trees for **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** proved equally unsuccessful although it did turn up the endemic **Abyssinian Catbird**, **Yellow-crowned Canary**, **Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher** and **Osprey**.

After a shortish drive we reached Goba and the Wabe Shebele Hotel.

Birds – 360

Mammals – 17

Day 8 - Goba - Sanetti Plateau

Today we would climb up into the Bale Mountain National Park reaching a height of 4106m. A **Great Sparrowhawk** in the grounds of the hotel got the day started. On the way up we stopped to try again for **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** without success but we did find **Bale Parisoma** and **Cinnamon Bracken Warbler**. As we headed up onto the Sanetti Plateau we encountered some spectacular rocky scenery. We stopped for the first of several groups of **Chestnut-naped Francolins** and **Rouget's**

Rails and then spent some time walking the rock strewn landscape, quickly noticing the change in altitude. Several flocks of **Spot-breasted Lapwings** were flying around making a lot of noise. Other birds included plenty of **Red-throated Pipits**, **Thekla Larks** and **Ethiopian Siskins**. Pushing on across the plateau we had both **Lammegerier** and **Golden Eagle** but unfortunately no **Ethiopian Wolves**. We did however have good views of **Giant Root Rat** and **Blick's Grass Rats**.

Dropping down the other side of the plateau we had a few more **Chestnut-naped Francolins**, and a fly past **Little Sparrowhawk**, as well as a displaying **Mountain Buzzard**. We stopped for lunch at the newly opened and impressive looking Bale Mountain Lodge where everyone apart from us seemed to have seen an **Ethiopian Wolf** up on the plateau.

Returning back over the Sanetti Plateau we stopped to scan for **Wolf** without success on several occasions. We were starting to sweat a bit when at around 4pm we eventually spotted an **Ethiopian Wolf** on a distant ridge. Adequate views in the scope and much relief as the prospect of dipping this critically endangered canine did not bear thinking about.

After that everything was pretty relaxed. We had numerous views of **Chestnut-naped Francolins** but still could not locate **Moorland Francolin** but did manage further good views of **Spot-breasted Lapwing** and **Wattled Crane**.

On the way back out of the park we tried again unsuccessfully to find **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** but a group of **Swifts** calling low overhead were identified on call as **African Black Swift** a supposed hypothetical species for Ethiopia.

Back at the hotel we returned to our rooms but the excitement was not over yet as a knock on the door from Attila summoned us back to the car park where 2 **Montane Nightjars** were calling and perching on the nearby lamp posts.

Birds – 373

Mammals – 21

Day 9 - Sof Omar

We had pre-arranged breakfast for 5am as we had a several hour journey to get to Sof Omar and we wanted to make the most of the birding before it got too hot. The majority of the route was on an unpaved road which ran through mainly agricultural land and led to a somewhat bumpy ride. En route we stopped for **Bristle-crowned Starling**, **Northern Red Bishop**, **Kori Bustard** and **Black-winged Kite** and also added **Somali Crow**.

Shortly before reaching Sof Omar the road deteriorated and rather than risk getting stuck we got out and walked the rest of the way down. The habitat, consisting of steep wooded hillsides, was home to our primary target today the rare and range restricted endemic **Salvadori's Seedeater**. We had left the cool of the high plateau behind us and even though it was still quite early it really was starting to warm up. **Yellow-spotted Petronia** and **Brown-tailed Rock Chat** were new and after a little searching at the bottom of the valley, we found a pair of **Salvadori's Seedeaters**

thanks to Attila's sharp hearing. We carried on birding the area and picked up a few more birds such as **White-crested Helmet Shrike**, **Northern Brownbul** and **Acacia Tit**.

We also had an encounter with a group of **Swifts** which left us scratching our heads somewhat. Some roadside birding on the way back added **Black-throated Barbet** and **Red-fronted Warbler**.

We took lunch in a nearby town before deciding to return to the Bale Mountain National Park HQ to try again for **African Wood Owl** and **Abyssinian Ground Thrush**. Unfortunately we failed to locate either bird although we had a few **Mountain Thrushes**, **Abyssinian Catbird** and **Yellow-crowned Canary**. With RMA and AB keen to photograph **Rouget's Rail** we left the park to find some suitable habitat a few miles away. Although there were plenty of **Rails** they did prove somewhat difficult to approach on foot!!! Whilst here we had further views of **Blue-winged Goose**, displaying **Groundscraper Thrushes**, **Ethiopian Cisticola** and **Black-winged Plover**. On return to the hotel the **Montane Nightjars** were again performing around the car park.

Birds – 387

Mammals – 24

Day 10 - Drive through Hareenna Forest to Negele

We decided to get up an hour earlier than the last time we went through the Bale Mountains National Park and this proved a wise move as we were the first vehicles along the road over the top to Hareenna Forest. After a few roadside **Rouget's Rails** we finally nailed **Moorland Francolin** when Measho spotted a pair feeding close to the road allowing some photographic opportunities. Next stop was for a group of **Spot-breasted Lapwings** feeding in the middle of road and then, a little further down the road Measho spotted a sleeping **Ethiopian Wolf**. Much closer than our previous sighting the animal was wearing an ear tag and we eventually spotted a second **Wolf** nearby.

So we left the National Park on a high and headed down into Hareenna Forest. First stop produced great views of a perched **Crowned Eagle** although the area around Bale Mountain Lodge was pretty quiet.

During our next stop we had good views of **Sharpe's Starling** and Attila glimpsed an **Abyssinian Crimsonwing**. Driving through the forest proper, AB & MCP had a **Forest Hog** run across the road and later on we saw a dead one on the side of the road. Today we had to cover 300km to Negele so we opted for a quick picnic lunch in the forest to save some time.

The next few hours were spent driving over and down through hilly acacia scrub. As always we stopped a few times for various birds such as **Golden-breasted Starling**, **Shelley's Starling** and **Black-chested Snake Eagle**.

Late afternoon we pulled up alongside a Fig Tree in the middle of nowhere and Measho announced that we had arrived at the site of one of the most eagerly

awaited birds of the trip, the endemic **Prince Ruspoli's Turaco**. It took us only a couple of minutes to locate 2 birds and for the next 20 minutes we enjoyed them in all their splendour.

Pushing on towards Negele we stopped to photograph a showy pair of **Red and Yellow Barbets**. Other stops resulted in **Lilac Breasted Roller** and **Great Spotted Cuckoo**.

After checking into the aptly named Turaco Hotel, we drove the short distance to a nearby restaurant to enjoy an authentic Ethiopian eating experience.

Birds – 400

Mammals – 27

Day 11 – Negele (Bogol Manyo Road)

Today we headed out onto the Liben Plain to look for one of the World's most critically endangered species, **Sidamo Lark**. On the way out we were treated to some great views of hunting **Amur Falcons** and **Lesser Kestrels**. We also stopped to add **Yellow-necked Spurfowl** and **White-crowned Starling**.

A good search at site number 1 produced no **Sidamo Larks** but we saw quite a few **Somali Short-toed Larks**, **Shelley's Sparrows** and **Isabelline Wheatears**.

At site number 2 we had more **Somali Short-toed Larks** before Attila eventually managed to spot a single **Sidamo Lark** skulking in the short grass.

With another high value endemic in the bag, we checked out a nearby lake. Here we managed to find a **Black-winged Pratincole** amongst the **Common Pratincoles**. On the lake itself there were 2 **Knob-billed Ducks** amongst the large number of **Egyptian Geese** and also a **Whiskered Tern**. We decided we would return to the hotel for an early afternoon siesta but not before we had added **Vitelline Masked Weaver** and **Levaillant's Cuckoo** and seen another **Kori Bustard**.

We headed back out at around 3pm and spent a pleasant couple of hours working the bush just outside Negele. A lot of the birds were familiar to us from our trip to Kenya in 2007 and included **Black-headed Heron**, **Purple Grenadier**, **Somali Bunting**, **Foxy Lark**, **Greater Honeyguide**, **White-browed Scrub Robin** and good views of **Buff-crested Bustard**. Mammals included both **Lesser Kudu** and **Günther's Dik Dik**.

Birds – 423

Mammals – 29

Day 12 - Drive to Yabello via Dawa River

After a hearty breakfast at the restaurant across the road from our hotel we drove out of Negele towards Yabello on the unpaved road we had travelled along yesterday. Yet again being the first vehicle along the road paid dividend with two pairs of roadside **Temminck's Coursers**, **White-bellied Bustard**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Yellow-necked Spurfowl** and several **Amur Falcons** perched up in bushes.

Before long we had left the plains around Negele behind for rolling acacia scrub. We started to notice a subtle change in species with **Rufous-crowned Roller**, **Grey Kestrel**, **Eastern Chanting Goshawk** and **Black-billed Wood Hoopoe**. We stopped briefly for a feeding flock of birds containing **White-crested Helmet Shrike**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver**, **Slate-coloured Boubou**, **Yellow-breasted Apalis**, **Marico Sunbird**, **Northern White-crowned Shrike** and **Red-billed Hornbill**.

Down at the Dawa River we went for a walk along the riverbank and eventually managed to find our main target a male **Juba Weaver**. We could not locate our secondary target **African White-winged Dove** but we had no need to worry as a little while later in the nearby village of Hudet we found several birds and caused a bit of a commotion as we left our vehicles to look at them. Some nearby **weaver** nests turned out to belong to **Black-capped Social Weaver** and we also had good views of **Banded Parisoma** and **Pale Prinia**.

Leaving Hudet we set off on what can only be described as a long straight road to Yabello. A quick stop produced 4 new birds in as many minutes, **Pygmy Batis**, **Bare-Faced Thrush**, **Somali Crombec** and **Pringle's Puffback**. Whilst at the next stop we had good views of several **Black Cuckoo-shrikes** and **Hunter's Sunbird**.

As the afternoon drive progressed, the acacia bush started to open out into more savannah-like and agricultural habitat. We stopped at several **weaver** nest sites, seeing both **Black-capped** and **Grey-capped Social Weavers** along with **Chestnut Weaver**. Several **D'Arnaud's Barbets** showed well and whilst watching these we found a pair of **Grey-headed Silverbills**. Final new bird of the day was **Northern Grosbeak Canary**.

Our hotel, the Yabello Mobile Hotel was pleasant enough and with an ok restaurant, we were able to eat on site for the next two nights.

Birds – 446

Mammals – 30

Day 13 - Yabello Wildlife Sanctuary

Today we would try for the only two endemics left on our target list. Target number one **Stresemann's Bush-crow** held a special significance as it is the cover bird to our much used field guide, Birds of the Horn of Africa. However, firstly on the way out of town, the ever eagle-eyed Measho spotted a pair of **Gabar Goshawks** on a roadside tree and we turned around for some great photographic opportunities.

Having filled our memory cards we set off on the long straight road down towards the Kenya border and the aptly named town, well for birders anyway, of Mega, but not before stopping for a pair of **White-bellied Bustards**.

It did not take us very long to find some **Bush-crows** although they were somewhat skittish when it came to photo opportunities. We also found a small drinking pool and had small groups of **Black-faced Sandgrouse** flying around as we watched the **Bush-crows**.

Target number two, the very range restricted **White-tailed Swallow** fell a short while later. That left us just two near endemic targets for the remainder of the trip, **Abyssinian Waxbill** and **Red-billed Pytilia**.

Now we could relax and we spent some time looking for **Red-naped Bushshrike**, which we duly saw along with **Foxy Lark**, **Green-winged Pytilia**, **Scaly Chatterer**, **Tiny Cisticola** and **Spotted Palm Thrush**.

A drive into Yabello Sanctuary Area produced more **Stresemann's Bush-crows** and some good views of **White-tailed Swallows** perching up in an Acacia Tree. A little while later we found another of our targets **Short-tailed Lark** from our vehicles and also saw 3 **Kori Bustards**.

Mammals this morning included **Grant's** and **Thompson's Gazelles** and some distant views of a group of **Northern Gerenuk**.

We returned to the hotel for a late lunch and then took an hour out before heading back into the field but not before we had crossed the road to add nesting **Speke's Weaver** to the trip list.

Measho took us to Burena Lodge, not too far from Yabello, to look for **Pearl-spotted Owlet** and after playing the call, one duly appeared in the tree above us. We could not locate a calling **Klaas's Cuckoo** but we had further good views of **Stresemann's Bush-crow** and a showy **Pygmy Falcon**. With the light starting to fade we went to some nearby acacia scrub to try our luck with **Donaldson Smith's Nightjar**. A near full moon aided our viewing and once we had picked up the call of a distant bird, we headed off through the bush and a few minutes later, we were watching the bird as it flew around our head calling.

Birds – 446

Mammals – 34

Day 14 - Drive from Yabello to Lake Awassa

We set off early this morning for the long drive to Lake Awassa. The road north to Addis Ababa is being upgraded and this meant some detours onto unpaved roads which added to the journey time. As always we managed a few roadside stops. The first at a small wetland area added **Woolly-necked Stork** to the trip list and gave us only our second **Steppe Buzzard** of the trip. We also had a **Side-Striped Jackal** cross the road in front of one of our vehicles and roadside **Stresemann's Bush-crow** and **Rouget's Rail**. The closer we got to Awassa, the worse the road got and we did not arrive in Awassa until after 2pm. We went straight to a local restaurant for a well-deserved lunch where we also bade farewell to one of our drivers Samson who was off to drive on another tour. Whilst we ate, our replacement driver and vehicle arrived and we then drove the short distance to check into our hotel for the night.

With check in out of the way we spent some time in the hotel grounds looking for **Spotted Creeper** and we soon had great views. Other birds in the gardens included

Rufous-necked Wryneck, Black-billed Wood Hoopoe, Buff-bellied Warbler and Hoopoe. The remainder of the afternoon and evening was spent following the footpath alongside Lake Awassa before eventually being picked up and driven back to the hotel. On the lake itself **African Pygmy Goose** was a welcome lifer for us and other trip additions included **Common Moorhen, Lesser Swamp Warbler, Northern Grosbeak Weaver, Blue-headed Coucal, African Reed Warbler, Black Crake** and one of our two missing near endemics, **Abyssinian Waxbill.**

Birds – 471

Mammals – 35

Day 15- Lake Awassa to Lake Ziway then on to Welkite

We spent an hour before breakfast walking along the lake shore again. **Fulvous Whistling Duck, White-faced Whistling Duck, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Sedge Warbler, European Reed Warbler** and **Dark-capped Yellow Warbler** were all new and the **Spotted Creeper** was again in the hotel gardens.

First proper stop of the day was the bustling Awassa Fish Market. Lots of people and lots of birds. Plenty of **White-winged Black Terns** were hawking back and fore and we enjoyed some close range views of **Great White Pelicans.** A walk in the park nearby helped add a few more trip ticks - **European Golden Oriole, Black-headed Batis, Violet-backed Starling** and **Lesser Honeyguide.**

After a mid-morning coffee break we headed off to Lake Ziway where a short spell before lunch produced **Black Heron, Anhinga, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Yellow-billed Stork** and lots of **Kittlitz's Plovers.** After lunch we returned to the lake for the impressive spectacle of hundreds of **Pelicans, Storks** and **Terns** all feeding within a few feet of crowds of people. Nearby we had good views of several hunting **Northern Carmine Bee-eaters.**

Late afternoon we set off on the longish drive to Welkite. A new tarmac road up into the highlands whilst not fully complete was very welcome. As we gained height, a few **Thick-billed Ravens** put in an appearance and we arrived at the Jyoka Hotel, Welkite in good time for dinner.

Birds – 483

Mammals – 36

Day 16 - Gibe Gorge, drive to Addis Ababa

We tried in vain this morning to find our one missing near endemic **Red-billed Pytilia** but it was not to be. But the bird that all of us really wanted to see was **Egyptian Plover** and we set out along the river bank followed by the usual gaggle of various sized children. At a distant bend in the river Attila spotted our target feeding in amongst a couple of **Wattled Lapwings** and **Spur-winged Plovers.** Somewhat distant views and in the heat haze as well, so we made plans to get closer to the 2 birds we had seen later in the morning. In the meantime, a check of the **finches** gave us some good views of several **Bar-breasted Firefinches** whilst **Snowy-crowned Robin Chat** and **Diederik Cuckoo** were also new for the trip.

Following a dirt track in our vehicles we managed to get to the area along the river where we hoped we could re-locate the **Egyptian Plovers**. It only took us a few minutes before we had found them at much closer range. We also had the added bonus of good views of several **Hippopotamus** asleep on the nearby riverbank. With the heat of the day really starting to kick in we headed back to our hotel for some lunch.

During the final the run back to Addis Ababa a road-side **Lappet-faced Vulture** feeding on a carcass was our best views of the trip and after re-fuelling on the outskirts of Addis, we headed along our final bumpy unpaved road towards Gefersa Reservoir. A large group of **Bee-eaters** on wires turned out to be **European Bee-eater** and we had the chance for some final views of endemics such as **Wattled Ibis** and **White-collared Pigeon**. At the reservoir, there were plenty of **Northern Shoveler** but no new **ducks**. A few **Three-banded Plovers** and **Blue-winged Geese** were scattered about the shore along with a pair of **African Stonechats**.

So with the sun setting, we packed our binoculars away and dropped down into the hustle and bustle of Addis Ababa and our final destination the KZ Hotel a few kms. from the Airport. After a quick freshen up we headed off to a nearby restaurant to say our goodbyes to Measho and Attila who was flying back to a Hungary later in the evening. Back at the hotel, the good news was that there was a free courtesy bus to the airport in the morning, so it was off to our rooms to pack our bags after a fabulous 16 days birding.

Birds – 490

Mammals – 37

Conclusions/Acknowledgements

I don't think we ever got bored of the diverse range of habitats and breath-taking scenery as we travelled around Ethiopia and on balance, we all agreed that it was up there in one of the top couple of trips we had undertaken. Whilst the standards of a lot of the roads was poor, there appeared to be quite a bit of infra-structure work on-going, that may improve the routes to some sites over the next few years.

That said, some of the unpaved roads we travelled on offered a great opportunity to get amongst the birds and mammals. Even in the countryside, Ethiopia is very populous and we attracted people pretty much whenever we stopped. Trying to creep up on a Stresemann's Bush-crow with 6 children in tow is definitely an acquired skill!

For the long drives, along some challenging roads, we are greatly indebted to the skill of our two main drivers, Cisse and Samson and towards the end of the trip, Samson's replacement Ibrahim.

Our local guide Measho worked tirelessly throughout the trip constantly spotting birds whether on foot or in a moving vehicle. We are very grateful for his efforts. He also engaged in many hours of interesting discussion in the lead vehicle with AB and MCP about the culture and history of this fabulous country.

Finally, we would like to offer a huge thanks to Attila from Ecotours for pulling together an itinerary that did just as we had asked and maximised endemic and near-endemic opportunities, in a tight 16 day time frame. Attila worked very hard to ensure everyone saw all the birds. This in itself was a challenge, given our tendency to wander off in 4 different directions upon exiting the vehicles. The fact that no-one missed any of the key birds is testimony to both Attila's patience and skills as a tour leader. Thanks Attila!