

Birds and wildlife of the Rift Valley

Ethiopia is located in north-eastern Africa, a mountainous country with the Great Rift Valley being a prominent feature. Our tour covers the migration period when bird activity and migration is at its peak. A highlight of Ethiopia is the remote and beautiful Bale Mountains National Park, home to Ethiopian Wolf. This tour to Ethiopia promises outstanding birding and sightings of rare mammals in the Ethiopian Highlands.

■ Please note the itinerary below is sometimes subject to change.

Day 1: Fly to Addis Ababa, with arrival early the next day. Transfer to the centre of the city for a night's stay.

Day 2: Today we head to Debre Birhan, travelling through farmland attracting Egyptian Vulture, Tawny and Steppe Eagles, Pallid and Montagu's Harriers, Thick-billed and Fan-tailed Ravens and flocks of wintering Red-throated Pipits. On arrival at Debre Birhan, we explore the road to Ankober. On lower fields we can expect Streaky Serin and Oortolan Buntings. The road climbs steeply through woodland, fields and traditional villages. Overhead we



Rouget's Rail Photo: Jo Finn

Dates

* Friday March 6th – Friday March 20th 2020

Leaders: Mark Finn and local guides

Group Size: 8

Birds: 390-450

* This tour may depart one day earlier/later due to flight schedules from the UK.

may locate Lammergeier and Mountain Buzzard plus flocks of Alpine and Scarce Swifts. Our main interest is finding Ankober Serin, a scarce Ethiopian endemic. Night at Debre Birhan.

Day 3: A visit to the Jemma Valley which holds Harwood's Francolin, a rare Ethiopian endemic. The cliffs and boulder-strewn slopes of the Jemma Valley may have White-billed Starlings, Stone Partridge and the extremely rare Salvadori's Serin. In gorges with small bushes, we hope to locate Foxy Cisticola, Speckle-fronted Weaver and Black-throated Firefinches. The monastery of Debre Libanos is adjacent to mature woodland holding Banded Barbet, African Lemon Dove and White-cheeked Turaco. Nearby, a gorge attracts White-winged and Mocking Cliffchats, Ruppell's Chat and, in scrubby areas, Erckel's Francolin. On our return to Addis Ababa, we explore the Suluta Plain, an important habitat for Blue-winged Goose, Wattled Ibis and Spot-breasted Lapwing.



Vulturine Guineafowl Photo: Jo Finn

Day 4: Today we join the Djibouti road and visit the seasonal crater lakes around Debre Zeyit. Chelekleka is an important area for Greater and Lesser Flamingos, passage ducks and shorebirds. Hora Lake is nearby where we may find Black-winged Lovebird, White-breasted White-eye, Grey-headed Batis and African Yellow Warbler. Transfer to Awash National Park and visit the acacia scrub and riverside campgrounds. The former has White-headed Buffalo Weaver and Nile Valley Sunbird. Along the river, we can expect Bruce's Green Pigeon, Nubian and Bearded Woodpeckers and Sulphur-breasted Bushshrikes. As dusk starts to fall, we should find Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Arabian, Kori, Black-bellied and Buff-crested Bustards and, on occasions, the rare Hartlaub's Bustard. Two-night stay at Awash Station.

Day 5: Today we join the Kudu Loop track running through acacia trees and past isolated villages. Typical birds of the area include Red-bellied Parrot, Gillet's Lark, Ashy Cisticola and Somali Fiscal. The

Fantalle Mountains dominate the landscape, a semi-dormant volcano resulting in a habitat of lava-flows and deep fissures. Interesting birds in this unique habitat include Sombre Chat, Blackstart, Yellow-throated Serin and Bristle-crowned Starling. Later in the day, we travel through the Sababer Plains where we should find Black-headed Lapwing, Superb Starling, Cyprus Pied, Pied and Isabelline Wheatears and Striped Kingfisher.

Day 6: After breakfast, we make the journey to Sodore where the River Awash is bordered by mature trees and gardens. Open areas have Clapperton's Francolin and Ethiopian Sawwings. By the river, migrants include Lesser Whitethroat, Thrush Nightingale and resident Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, White-browed Coucal and Slender-billed Starlings. Later in the day, we travel to Lake Langano where the grounds of the hotel are excellent for birds, including many migrants from Europe and Asia. A steep escarpment attracts Little Rock Thrush. Scrub lures Boran Cisticola, Ruppell's and Lesser



Strsemann's Bush Crow Photo: Jo Finn

Masked Weavers and Red-billed Firefinches.

Day 7: Bale Mountains National Park is our destination and the town of Goba. En route we pass through farmland used for cereal production and sheep grazing. Birds of prey can be numerous including Eastern Imperial Eagle, Lanner Falcon and Lesser Kestrel. Grass verges attract White-collared Pigeons, Ethiopian Longclaw, Red-breasted Wheatear and Alpine Chats whilst scrub lures Moorland and Chestnut-naped Francolins and Cinnamon Bracken Warblers. In the forest of Dinsho we expect to find White-backed Black Tit and Abyssinian Ground Thrush. Goba is our base where we have a two-night stay.

Day 8: Beyond Goba is an extensive stand of juniper forest, home to Abyssinian Catbird, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, African, Abyssinian and Bare-faced Thrushes, Abyssinian Woodpecker and the endemic sub-species of Brown Woodland Warbler. Colourful Ruppell's Robin-chats frequent the roadside. In the park itself,

pools attract remnant populations of Ruddy Shelduck, Wattled Crane and endemic Rouget's Rail. Our main objective is to find and study Ethiopian Wolves hunting for mole rats. Less than 600 of these impressive animals survive. Return to Goba, revisiting the forest for Tacazze and Malachite Sunbirds. Fields in and around Goba have Black-winged Lapwing, Erlanger's Short-toed Lark and Groundscraper Thrushes.

Day 9: We retrace our steps towards the main road at Awassa with a visit to Lake Awassa for close views of White Pelican, Fulvous and White-faced Whistling Ducks and Grey-headed Gulls. In the more sheltered areas of reeds we may find African Pygmy Goose, Lesser Moorhen and White-backed Duck. Flooded fields lure waders and African Snipe. Transfer to Aregash Lodge for an overnight stay.

Day 10: Today we pass through acacia and desert-like habitats to the remote town of Negele. Around Negele, woodland holds the spectacular Ruspoli's Turaco, White-

winged Collared Dove, Juba Weaver and Brown-rumped Bunting. Overnight at Negele.

Day 11: Early start to visit the Liben Plains which hold several interesting birds in dry, open country. The plains support Heuglin's Bustard, endemic Sidamo Larks, Rufous Short-toed Lark, Tiny Cisticola and Golden Pipit. Flowering shrubs attract Hunter's Sunbird. Transfer to Yabelo for two nights.

Day 12: Yabelo is an important junction town in the middle of a red sandstone landscape dotted with termite mounds and acacia trees. Around the hotel complex, Red-winged and White-crowned Starlings nest in old buildings. Several spectacular birds occur south of Yabelo, notably the charismatic Stresemann's Bush Crow and parties of colourful Vulturine Guineafowl. Acacias attract Pygmy Falcon, Grey Wren Warbler, Shelley's, Magpie and Golden-breasted Starlings, Red and Yellow Barbet and Black-billed Woodhoopoe. After lunch, we visit a traditional area for White-tailed Swallows, Crested Francolin, Yellow-necked Spurfowl and African Black-headed Orioles. Birds of prey can be numerous around Yabelo and include Lappet-faced and White-headed Vultures, Wahlberg's Eagle and migrant Lesser-spotted Eagles.

Day 13: A travelling day to the city of Awassa, an important area for birds and wildlife. On arrival, an exploration of the grounds may produce African Spotted Creeper, Grey and Bearded Woodpeckers, Pringle's Puffback and Blue-headed Coucal. Overnight at Awassa.

Day 14: Morning visit to Lake Awassa and the fish quay. The latter has Yellow-billed Kite, Black Egret, Black Crake and, in surrounding large trees and scrub, Black-winged Lovebird, Banded Barbet, Red-fronted Tinkerbird and Eastern Black-headed Oriole. Lake Awassa, although small in size, is a regular haunt of Pink-backed Pelican, African Pygmy Goose, Marsh Harrier and migrant ducks and warblers. After lunch, we transfer to Wondo Genet watching the rocky hillsides for Long-billed Pipit and grasslands holding Grey-backed

Fiscal, Woodchat Shrike and Plain-backed Pipit. On arrival at Wondo Genet, we search the grounds for Dark-headed Oriole, White-breasted White-eye and Silvery-cheeked Hornbills. Overnight at Wondo Genet.

Day 15: Pre-breakfast walk into the forest for Yellow-fronted Parrot, Half-collared Kingfisher, Crowned and Hemprich's Hornbills and Abyssinian Hill Babblers. Along the tracks, we may encounter Mountain Wagtail, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and Eastern Olive Sunbird. Further up the track, we have a chance of locating Narina Trogons. In the afternoon, we head back to Addis Ababa and the Ghion Hotel. Its extensive gardens attract Blue-breasted Bee-eater. After a farewell dinner, we transfer to the new airport for our flight home to Europe where arrival is early on the following day.

Prices

Ground Price: £3,995
Single room: £210
Deposit: £400
*Air Fare: £500

This holiday is fully inclusive of flights, accommodation and meals, transport, entrance and permit fees, guidance and tips.

Not included: drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature and any fuel surcharges.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*