

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 promises outstanding birding and sightings of rare mammals in the Ethiopian Highlands. Please note the itinerary below is sometimes subject to change.

Days 1-2: Fly to Addis Ababa, with arrival early the next day. Transfer to the city centre for a night's stay. In the afternoon a visit to the grounds of the Ghion Hotel where our first Ethiopian birds await us, including Nyanza Swift, Black-winged Lovebird, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, Mountain Thrush, Tacazze Sunbird and Streaky Seedeater.

Day 3: On our departure from Addis Ababa, we explore the Suluta Plain, an important habitat for Blue-winged Goose, Wattled Ibis and Spot-breasted Lapwing. 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 Cliff Chats, Rüppell's Black Chat and, in scrubby areas, Erckel's Francolin. Night in Fiche.

Day 4: 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 have White-billed Starling, Stone Partridge and the rare Salvadori's Serin. In gorges with small bushes, we hope to locate Foxy Cisticola, Speckle-fronted Weaver and Black-throated Firefinch. Further down the valley exposed cliffs hold White-winged Cliff Chat, Little Rock Thrush, Lesser Striped Swallow, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and Abyssinian Wheatear. Along the Jemma River, a tributary of the White Nile, fruiting trees lure Lesser Honeyguide, Northern Crombec, Vitteline Masked Weaver and Yellow-spotted and Sahel Bush Sparrows. Transfer to Lemi for the night.

Dates

TOUR A: *Friday November 26th – Wednesday December 15th 2021

TOUR B: *Friday November 25th – Wednesday December 14th 2022

Leaders: Mark Finn (A) and Simon Papps (B)

Group Size: 8

Birds: 390–450

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

Days 5-6: Today we head to Debre Birhan, travelling through farmland that holds Egyptian Vulture, Tawny and Steppe Eagles, Pallid and Montagu's Harriers, Fan-tailed Raven and wintering Red-throated Pipits. On arrival at Debre Birhan, we explore the road to Ankober. On lower fields we can expect Augur Buzzard, Lesser Kestrel, White-collared Pigeon, Isabelline Wheatear, Northern Fiscal, Western Yellow Wagtail and Ortolan Bunting. Livestock attract Hooded, White-backed and Bearded Vultures. Beyond Debre Birhan the road rises over a few kilometres until it reaches the rocky outcrop of Gemessa Gadal – an area for Ankober Serin, Rock Martin and singing Cinnamon Bracken Warbler. Driving along old Ankober Road the grassy habitats often have Red-breasted Wheatear, Groundscraper Thrush, Ethiopian Siskin, Ethiopian Longclaw, Red-billed Oxpecker,



Secretarybird Photo: Jo Finn

African Stonechat, Yellow-crowned and Yellow Bishops and Ethiopian Cisticola.

Days 7-8: Transfer to Awash National Park and explore 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 Bushshrike. As dusk starts to fall, we should locate Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Arabian, Kori, Black-bellied and Buff-crested Bustards and, if we are lucky, the rare Hartlaub's Bustard. On Day 8 we visit Ali Dege, an area of plains habitat with a few clumps of trees and cover, which has Somali Ostrich and wintering Montagu's and Pallid Harriers. The acacia bushes and adjacent bare ground attract Woodchat and Great Grey Shrikes, Tawny Pipit and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark. Ali Dege is also a reliable place to see Secretarybird, Arabian Bustard, Black-winged and

Scissor-tailed Kites, Taita and Somali Fiscals, Northern White-crowned Shrike and Gillett's Lark. A return to Awash National Park for White-bellied Go-away-bird, Crested Francolin and along the river edge Pied, Great and Grey-headed Kingfishers, Striated Heron and Eastern Plantain-eater.

Day 9-10: Lake Betakes is surrounded by lava fields and isolated trees. Our main interest is the lava fields which attract Western Osprey, Pied and Isabelline Wheatears, Beautiful, Variable and Nile Valley Sunbirds and Blackstart. This area is also home to Sombre Rock Chat, a little-known endemic. Travel to Lake Langanu where the grounds of the hotel are excellent for birds, including migrants from Europe and Asia. A steep escarpment has Little Rock Thrush whilst scrubby patches have Boran Cisticola and Rüppell's and Lesser Masked Weavers. Langanu Lodge is an excellent place to stay and birdwatch around the extensive grounds. African

Hoopoe and Marico and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds occur around the reception area. A walk down towards the lake shore may produce Mocking Cliff Chat, Red-winged Starling, Heuglin's White-eye, Rattling Cisticola, Little and Vitteline Masked Weavers. The gardens at the bottom of the road often have Red-throated Wryneck, Little Swift, African Thrush, Orange-bellied Parrot, Grey-headed Batis, Plain Martin and Grey-backed Fiscal.

Day 11: Bale Mountains National Park is our destination. 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 Pigeon, Ethiopian Longclaw, Red-breasted Wheatear and Alpine Chat, whilst scrub holds Moorland and Chestnut-naped Francolins and Cinnamon Bracken Warbler. In the juniper forest of Dinsho we expect to find Abyssinian and African Wood Owls, White-backed Black Tit, Abyssinian Ground Thrush, Brown Parisoma, Malachite Sunbird and Abyssinian Siskin. Goba is our base for a two-night stay.

Day 12: Beyond Goba is an extensive stand of juniper forest, home to Abyssinian Catbird, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher,



Abdims Stork Photo: Jo Finn

African, Abyssinian and Bare-faced Thrushes, Abyssinian Woodpecker and the endemic subspecies of Brown Woodland Warbler. In the park itself, pools attract remnant populations of Ruddy Shelduck, Wattled Crane and the 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. Later in the day we return to Goba, revisiting the forest for Tacazze and Malachite Sunbirds. Fields in and around Goba attract Black-winged Lapwing, Erlanger's Lark and Groundscraper Thrush.

Day 13: Today we cross the Bale Mountains en route to Negele in eastern Ethiopia. Our main interest is the Haremma Forest which holds the rare African White-winged Dove, Mountain Buzzard, Rameron Pigeon, Narina Trogon and African Citril. The habitat changes to acacia and desert-like conditions with patches of trees holding the spectacular Ruspoli's Turaco, Juba Weaver and Brown-rumped Bunting. Two nights in Negele.

Day 14: Early start to visit the Liben Plains which hold several interesting birds of dry, open country. This is a protected area although it suffers from over-grazing by livestock. On the plain we should find the scarce Archer's Lark, Somali Lark, Tawny Pipit, Temminck's Courser and Kori Bustard. Birds occurring around farms include White-crowned and Superb Starlings and Cut-throat Finch. Darusalem is a small village with a habitat of acacia, farmland and rocky slopes. The acacia attracts Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Shelley's Starling, Dodson's Bulbul, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Purple Grenadier, Salvadori's Seed eater and Somali Bunting.

Days 15-16: Transfer to Yabelo, 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. On Day 15 we head south of Yabelo to an area of cliffs to search for the recently described Black-faced Francolin. In the cliffs Verreaux's

Eagles hunt the local Rock Hyrax for food. The river area is productive for Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, African Hoopoe, Red-fronted Tinkerbird and Rattling Cisticola. Bare areas with bushes are favoured by Long-billed Pipit and Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike. Other species we may see include Rufous Chatterer, Red-headed Weaver and Singing Cisticola. Along the El Soad road several spectacular birds occur, notably the charismatic Stresemann's Bushcrow and parties of colourful Vulturine Guineaowl. Acacias attract Pygmy Falcon, Grey Wren-Warbler, Shelley's, Magpie and Golden-breasted Starlings, Red-and-yellow Barbet and Black-billed Woodhoopoe. The plain also has Pygmy Falcon, Crowned Lapwing, White-tailed Swallow, Rosy-patched Bushshrike and Somali and Taita Fiscals. The drier areas often have Flappet Lark and White-bellied Canary. On the way back to Yabello we make roadside stops for Abyssinian Scimitarbill, D'Arnaud's Barbet, White-browed Scrub Robin, Spotted Palm Thrush, Black-capped Social Weaver, Purple Grenadier and Orange-winged Pytilia.

Day 17: 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. Three nights at Awassa.

Days 18-19: 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, Western Marsh Harrier and migrant ducks, terns and warblers. One day we visit Wondo Genet, watching the rocky hillsides for Long-billed Pipit en route. On arrival we search the area for Ethiopian Oriole, Silvery-cheeked, Crowned and Hemprich's Hornbills, Yellow-fronted Parrot, Half-collared Kingfisher and Abyssinian Hill Babbler. Along the tracks, we may encoun-



Superb Starling Photo: Jo Finn

ter Mountain Wagtail, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and Eastern Olive Sunbird.

Day 20: On our last day in Ethiopia we visit the wetlands of Debra Zeit. Late afternoon travel back to Addis Ababa for late evening flights back to Europe and North America with arrival on the 15th.

Prices

Ground Price: £4295
 Single room: £275
 Deposit: £400
 *Air Fare: £720

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

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

* Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights