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## **Birding Africa Ethiopia Tour**

7 - 22 February 2015

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Photos by Tertius Gous

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### **SUMMARY**

Our intensive 16-day tour to Ethiopia was highly successful and we managed to locate all the Ethiopian and Eritrean endemics, and ended with a total of 500 bird species.

We started the tour with **Brown-rumped Seedeater**, **Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher**, **Montane White-eye**, **Mountain Thrush** and **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** in the gardens of our hotel in Addis Ababa, before setting off for Debre Birhan via the highland plains north-east of Addis where we found **Erlanger's Lark**, **Red-breasted Wheatear**, **Abyssinian Wheatear**, **Ethiopian Siskin**, **Black Stork**, **Thick-billed Raven**, **Wattled Ibis**, **Blue-winged Goose**, **White-collared Pigeon** and **White-winged Cliff Chat**. A short side trip yielded **Ankober Serin**, **Verreaux's Eagle** and *Gelada Baboon*.

We then descended the Rift Valley below the Ankober escarpment for Melka Ghebdu where we found **Yellow-throated Seedeater**, **Crimson-rumped Waxbill**, **Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver**, **Black Scrub Robin**, **Blue-breasted Bee-eater**, **Half-collared Kingfisher**, **Eastern Plantain-eater**, **Bare-faced Go-away-bird**, **Yellow-breasted Barbet**, **Rüppell's Weaver**, **Bruce's Green Pigeon** and **Short-toed Snake Eagle**. The arid Awash region was next on our itinerary but not before stopping over at a large lake where we added many water birds including **Greater and Lesser Flamingos** and **Black Crowned and Common Cranes**. At Bilen Lodge we had **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse**, **Nile Valley Sunbird**, **Northern Carmine Bee-eaters**, **Greater Painted-snipe** and **Slender-tailed Nightjar**.

Nearby plains produced **Somali Ostrich, Arabian Bustard, Egyptian Nightjar** and **Three-banded Courser**. The open thornveld savanna of the Awash National Park was a highlight and revealed **Kori Bustard, White-bellied**



**Bustard, Gillett's Lark, Red-winged Lark, Abyssinian Roller, Egyptian Vulture, Greyish Eagle-Owl, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Straw-tailed Whydah** and **Somali Fiscal**. The lava flow below Mount Fantale produced **Sombre Rock Chat, Blackstart** and **Striolated Bunting**.

We then travelled south to Bishangari Lodge along the shore of Lake Langano in the central Rift Valley where we had great views of **Yellow-fronted Parrot, African Goshawk, Narina Trogon, White-cheeked Turaco (above), Scaly Francolin** and **Banded Barbet**. Nearby were **Northern White-faced Owl, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Red-throated Wryneck, Black-winged Lovebird** and **Little Rock Thrush**. At Wondo Genet both **Abyssinian Oriole** and **Abyssinian Woodpecker** showed well.

The Bale Mountains National Park was another highlight with *Ethiopian wolves (next page)* predated on *Giant Mole Rats* stealing the show. Many memorable birds were seen here including **Cape Eagle-Owl, Abyssinian Owl, Spot-breasted Lapwing, Ethiopian Cisticola, Abyssinian Longclaw, Rouget's Rail, Abyssinian Catbird, White-backed Black Tit, Chestnut-naped**

**Francolin, Moorland Francolin, Ayres's Hawk Eagle, Bale Parisoma, Red-billed Chough and Bearded Vulture.** The Hareenna Forest produced **Scarce Swift, Mountain Buzzard, Crowned Eagle, African Hill Babbler and Cinnamon Bracken Warbler.** **Salvadori's Seedeater** and **Prince Ruspoli's Turaco** were seen along the road to Negele.

The Liben Plain was home to **Liben (Sidamo) Lark, Plain-backed Pipit, Pectoral-patch Cisticola, Black-winged Lapwing, Somali Crow** and **Temminck's Courser.** Nearby we found the sought-after **Juba Weaver** and many starling species including **Wattled, Superb, Greater Blue-eared, Golden-breasted, Shelley's** and **Magpie Starling.**

We then travelled to the dry *Acacia-Commiphora* dominated woodlands of southern Ethiopia in the Yabello region where we recorded **African White-winged Dove, Stresemann's Bush-crow, White-tailed Swallow, African Orange-bellied Parrot, Red-naped Bush-Shrike, Somali Crombec, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Northern Grosbeak-Canary, Pringle's Puffback, Rufous Chatterer, Scaly Chatterer, Pygmy Batis, Tiny Cisticola, Taita Fiscal, Bristle-crowned Starling** and **Donaldson Smith's Nightjar.**

From Yabello we ventured north again to Lake Awassa where we saw **African Pygmy Goose, Lesser Jacana, Baillon's Crake, White-backed Duck** and the grounds of our hotel produced **Spotted Creeper.** A detour was successful with **Wattled Crane.** Then it was down the Gibe Gorge to the western lowlands of Ethiopia where we found **Yellow-rumped (White-throated) Seedeater, Gambaga Flycatcher, Brown-rumped Bunting, Green-backed Eremomela, Foxy Cisticola, Bar-breasted Firefinch, Abyssinian Waxbill, Vinaceous Dove** and **Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat.** The Jemma Valley was our last destination of the tour and this venue delivered **Harwood's Francolin, Erckel's Francolin, Rüppell's Black Chat, White-billed Starling, Fox Kestrel** and **Red-billed Pytilia.**



## FULL REPORT

The first day of the tour started with early morning introductory birding around the grounds of the Ghion Hotel in Addis Ababa for some of us while we waited for the rest of the group to arrive. The flowering plants in the garden attracted many **Tacazze Sunbirds** which were joined by **Variable Sunbird**, **Baglafaecht Weaver**, **Speckled Mousebird**, **Montane White-eye**, **Brown-rumped Seedeater**, **Streaky Seedeater** and **African Citril**. There were also **Swainson's Sparrow**, **Speckled Pigeon**, **Dusky Turtle Dove**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Abyssinian (Mountain) Thrush**, **African Silverbill**, **Bronze Mannikin**, **Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher** and a surprise was an **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** feeding quietly on the lawn in a more wooded section of the garden.

At mid-morning when all members of the group were present we set off for the town of Debre Birhan, north-east of Addis. Our route took us across the grassy highland plains where birding en route produced many memorable birds such as **White-winged Cliff Chat**, **Wattled Ibis**, **Blue-winged Goose**, **Black Stork**, **Nyanza Swift**, **Mottled Swift**, **White-collared Pigeon**, **Thick-billed Raven**, **Cape Crow**, **Erlanger's Lark**, **Thekla Lark**, **Red-breasted Wheatear**, **Abyssinian Wheatear** and **Ethiopian Siskin**. At one of our birding stops we saw no less than seven species of **vulture** consisting of **Bearded**, **Egyptian**, **Rüppell's**, **Lappet-faced**, **White-headed**, **White-backed** and **Hooded**, as well as other raptors such as **Steppe Eagle**, **Yellow-billed Kite** and **Common Kestrel**. This experience confirms the fact that Ethiopia is one of Africa's premier raptor watching destinations and one can stop almost anywhere in the country, look up, and see one or more raptors soaring in the sky. After settling in and having lunch at our hotel in Debre Birhan, we departed for the Ankober escarpment further north to search for the main target of the area, the endemic **Ankober Serin** which only occurs at altitudes of over 2,600 m. The area is often shrouded in dense mist but fortunately the weather was crisp and clear when we arrived, and soon we had close views of several serins! The view from the highest cliffs down the valley far below was breathtaking and a **Verreaux's Eagle** that soared past made it even more spectacular. The eagle was soon joined by a few **Fan-tailed Ravens** while *Gelada Baboons* scurried away on the cliffs below us.

The next morning saw us up bright and early and eager to venture down the Ankober escarpment into the Rift Valley for the first time. Our aim was a hot lowland valley through which the Melka Ghebdu stream flows. The birding started with a quick stop at a village at the top of the valley where we added **Hemprich's Hornbill**, **Bare-faced (Brown-faced) Go-away-bird**, **Red-headed Weaver**, **Bruce's Green Pigeon** and **White-rumped Babbler**. We then entered the valley and soon had saturation views of the main target of the area, the endemic **Yellow-throated Seedeater**, in the streamside thickets. Early morning bird activity was high and our list grew rapidly as we added **Crimson-rumped Waxbill**, **Yellow-breasted Barbet**, **Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Rüppell's Weaver**, **Eastern Plantain-eater**, **White-bellied Go-away-bird**, **Red-billed Firefinch**, **Red-cheeked Cordon-blue**, **Black-cheeked Waxbill**, **Village Indigobird**, **Straw-tailed Whydah**, **Northern Crombec**, **Black Scrub Robin**,

**Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, Black-billed Barbet, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Mountain Wagtail, Western Yellow Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, White Wagtail, Steppe Eagle and Short-toed Snake-Eagle.** Several kingfisher species showed well, including **African Pygmy, Malachite, Half-collared, Giant and Pied.** After a very satisfying morning we departed for Addis Ababa via a lunch stop in Debre Birhan.

We overnighted at Ghion Hotel in Addis again and the following morning birded the grounds of the hotel. We managed to find all the birds that were seen on the first morning to give those that were not present then the chance to catch-up. **Black Sparrowhawk, Rüppell's Robin-Chat, African Dusky Flycatcher and Brown Parisoma** were new birds for the whole group. We then departed for the arid savanna of the Awash region of the north-eastern Rift Valley with a very productive birding stop at a shallow, ephemeral pan with a broad shoreline and large floodplain that attracts large numbers of birds, and we managed to see resident species such as **White-backed Duck, Spur-winged Goose, Hamerkop, Hottentot Teal, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Wattled Ibis, Squacco Heron, Pink-backed Pelican, Black Crowned Crane, Spur-winged Lapwing, Brown-throated (Plain) Martin and African Pipit;** and numerous Palearctic migrants including **Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Garganey, Eurasian Teal, Little Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Gull-billed Tern, Sand Martin** and huge flocks of **Common Cranes.** Above raptors such as **Yellow-billed Kite, Steppe Eagle, Hooded Vulture, White-backed Vulture** and **Rüppell's Vulture** entertained us.

Bad luck hit us at our lunch stop in the town of Awash when we discovered that our vehicle was leaking fuel through a small hole in the fuel tank. This necessitated immediate repairs that unfortunately resulted in us losing out on the planned afternoon birding session at our next destination, Bilen Lodge. Fortunately, however, there was ample time the next morning to enjoy the birds of the arid thornveld savanna and hot spring surrounding the lodge. Our list included **Shining and Nile Valley Sunbird, Grey Wren-Warbler, Senegal Thick-knee,** large numbers of **Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, Pallid and Montagu's Harriers, Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Lark,** large flocks of **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Hottentot Teal, Black-crowned Night Heron, Striated Heron,** the only **Greater Painted-snipe** of the trip, **African Jacana,** several waders including **Green Sandpiper, Little Stint and Temminck's Stint, Morning Collared Dove, European Turtle Dove, Slender-tailed Nightjar, Little Bee-eater, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Superb Starling, White-headed Buffalo Weaver** and **Red-billed Quelea.**

Nearby we soon had several great sightings of **Arabian Bustard.** Scanning of the plains revealed **Somali Ostrich** as well as *Soemmering's Gazelle* and *Grevy's Zebra.* A pleasant surprise was finding a few roosting **Egyptian Nightjars** and a single **Three-banded Courser.** *Hamadryas Baboon* was seen along the road near the town of Awash. We then proceeded to the expansive thornveld savannas and open plains of the Awash National Park where we spent the remainder of the afternoon and the next morning. Here we managed to find several **Kori Bustards** as well as **White-bellied Bustard** and **Buff-crested Bustard,** but Hartlaub's Bustard proved elusive. **Gillett's Lark** showed well and we managed to track down a rather obliging **Red-winged Lark,** while **Chestnut-**

**backed Sparrow-Lark** and **Singing Bush Lark** also put in an appearance. We had good raptor sightings and witnessed a spectacular aerial dogfight between a juvenile **Steppe Eagle** and a **Tawny Eagle**. Other raptors included adult and immature **Egyptian Vultures**, **Rüppell's Vulture**, **Dark Chanting Goshawk**, **Martial Eagle**, a pair of **Lanner Falcons** and **Greyish Eagle-Owl** at its daytime roost. Many other birds were also seen, including **Yellow-necked Spurrow**, **Ashy Cisticola**, **Blue-naped Mousebird**, **Straw-tailed Whydah**, **Abyssinian Roller**, **Striped Kingfisher**, **Abyssinian Scimitarbill**, **Cardinal Woodpecker**, **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill**, **Rosy-patched Bush-shrike**, **Red-tailed Shrike**, **Somali Fiscal**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Yellow-bellied Eremomela**, **Red-billed Oxpecker**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Northern Wheatear**, **African Grey Flycatcher**, **White-browed Sparrow-Weaver**, **Yellow-spotted Petronia**, **Green-winged Pytilia**, **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah** and **Tawny Pipit**. The Park is also a haven for mammals and we had good sightings of *Olive Baboon*, *Ethiopian (Scrub) Hare*, *Unstriped Ground Squirrel*, *Common (Golden) Jackal*, *Lesser Kudu*, *Salt's Dik-dik*, *Soemmering's Gazelle* and *Beisa Oryx*.

From the Awash National Park we proceeded to Lake Beseka and the surrounding lava flow formed by the volcanic Mount Fantale nearby. The lake produced similar waterbirds than what we had before with **Little Egret**, **Reed Cormorant** and **White-winged Tern** being new additions to the list. The nearby lava flow is normally home to Sombre Rock Chat but dedicated searching failed to find this drab endemic, although we did manage to find **Blackstart**, **Striolated Bunting** and **Red-fronted Warbler** as consolation. Fortunately **Sombre Rock Chat** showed well later, but not after even more dedicated searching in the midday heat! En route to our next destination, Bishangari Lodge, we made a quick stop at Lake Koka to view more waterbirds and managed to add **Saddle-billed Stork** and **Common Snipe** to the list.

Bishangari Lodge is situated on the moister south-eastern shore of Lake Langano in the central Rift Valley. Our early morning vigil at the lodge was handsomely rewarded with great sightings of **Yellow-fronted Parrots** as they flew in from the forest to feed on seeding shrubs on the lake shore. A single **African Goshawk** (*unduliventer* subspecies) also put in an appearance. **Scaly Francolin** was seen lurking in the forest understorey surrounding the lodge. The forest also produced **Lemon Dove**, **Tambourine Dove**, **Narina Trogon**, **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**, **Ethiopian Boubou**, **White-cheeked Turaco**, **Klaas's Cuckoo**, **Double-toothed Barbet**, **Broad-billed Roller**, **Spectacled Weaver**, **Collared Sunbird**, **Scaly-throated Honeyguide** and **Red-capped Robin-Chat**. Birds seen in the surrounding woodlands consisted of **Black Scimitarbill**, **Namaqua Dove**, **Greater Honeyguide**, **Lesser Honeyguide**, **Eastern Grey Woodpecker**, **Nubian Woodpecker**, **Red-fronted Tinkerbird**, **Banded Barbet**, **Woodland Kingfisher**, **Grey-headed Batis**, **Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike**, **Rattling Cisticola**, **Black-crowned Tchagra**, **Bare-faced (Brown-faced) Go-away-bird**, **Wahlberg's Eagle**, **Red-headed Weaver**, **Blue-spotted Wood Dove**, **Grey-backed Fiscal**, **White-winged Black Tit**, **Red-faced Crombec**, **Rüppell's Starling** and **Bush Petronia**, and **Great White and Pink-backed Pelicans** flew over lake.

We decided to have lunch at a nearby hotel on the southern shore of Lake Langano which proved very productive for birds. **Grey-headed Gull**, **Lesser Black-backed Gull** and **Gull-billed Tern** were seen over lake while many

**Yellow-billed Kites** were present. The woodland and cliffs nearby produced **Black-billed Barbet**, two **Northern White-faced Owls** at their day roost, **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl** at its day roost, **Red-throated Wryneck**, **Tawny Eagle**, **Hemprich's Hornbill**, **Red-fronted Barbet**, **African Orange-bellied Parrot**, **Pearl-spotted Owlet**, **Black-winged Lovebird**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Garden Warbler**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Menetries's Warbler**, **Common Redstart**, **Mocking Cliff Chat**, **Little Rock Thrush**, **Northern Black Flycatcher**, **White-bellied Canary** and **Little Weaver**.

Wondo Genet was the next stop on our itinerary and here we spent a few hours in the early morning birding the degraded forested hillside. Our main targets here were **Abyssinian Oriole** and **Abyssinian Woodpecker** which we found fairly easily. **Scaly Francolin** was heard, while we saw **African Goshawk**, the only **Little Sparrowhawk** of trip, **Black-winged Lovebird**, **Yellow-fronted Parrot**, **White-cheeked Turaco**, **Blue-headed Coucal**, **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**, **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird**, **Lesser Honeyguide**, **Brown-throated Wattle-eye**, **Northern Puffback**, **Ethiopian Boubou**, **African Paradise Flycatcher**, **Black Saw-wing**, **Slender-billed Starling**, **Rüppell's Robin-Chat**, **Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher**, **Bronze** and **Black-and-white Mannikin**, **Mountain Wagtail** and **African Citril**.

From Wondo Genet we started gaining altitude as we travelled to the Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP). En route we saw many corvids including, **Cape and Pied Crow**, **Thick-billed and Fan-tailed Raven**, and **Red-billed Chough**. At some point the road passed close to a ravine where we had great views of **Cape Eagle-Owl** with the help of some locals. Roadside ponds with surrounding open grassland provided some excellent birding in the form of **Spot-breasted Lapwing**, **Abyssinian Longclaw**, **Rouget's Rail**, **Wattled Ibis**, **Blue-winged Goose**, **Ethiopian Cisticola**, **African Snipe**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Red-throated Pipit**, **Moorland Chat**, **White-collared Pigeon**, **Yellow Bishop** and **Ethiopian Siskin**. Raptors overhead included **Griffon Vulture**, **Augur Buzzard**, **Tawny Eagle**, **Lesser Kestrel** and **Common Kestrel**. We birded the *Hagenia* and juniper woodlands where we found a roosting **Abyssinian Owl** as well as an **African Wood-Owl** nest with two large fluffy chicks. We managed close-up sightings of **Abyssinian Woodpecker** and connected well with **Abyssinian Catbird**, **White-backed Black Tit**, **Yellow-crowned Canary**, **Dusky Turtle Dove**, **Abyssinian Thrush**, **Brown-rumped Seedeater** and **Streaky Seedeater**, while being watched by *Mountain Nyala* and *Menelik's Bushbuck*.

We spent a full day exploring the foothills and Afro-alpine moorlands of the Sanetti Plateau, and later descended into the moist Harenna Forest on the southern slopes of the Bale massif. Ascending the plateau through the foothills **Alpine Swifts** and a lone **Ayres's Hawk Eagle** put in an appearance and a stop near some St John's-wort trees soon had "**Bale Parisoma**" (the *griseiventris* race of Brown Parisoma) giving us great views. Then followed **Rouget's Rail**, **Chestnut-naped Francolin** and **African Stonechat**, and at the top of the plateau we found **Moorland Francolin**, **Wattled Ibis**, **Groundscraper Thrush** and numerous **Moorland Chats**. The alpine tarns had **Blue-winged Goose**, **Yellow-billed Duck** and **Northern Pintail** with **Thekla Lark** nearby. Raptors were plentiful and we had many soaring **Steppe Eagles**, occasional **Tawny Eagles**, many **Augur Buzzards**, a **Verreaux's Eagle** and a magnificent

**Bearded Vulture.** There was a *Klipspringer* etched against the skyline on a rocky ridge. The undoubted highlight for many was the endangered *Ethiopian Wolf* and we had a few sightings including witnessing a wolf hunting rodents, their main prey item. It was difficult to get good views of the highland rodents as they scurried away as soon as we stopped to have look, but we did manage to see *Giant Mole Rat*, *Blick's Grass Rat*, *Black-clawed Brush-furred Rat* and *Ethiopian Meadow Rat*. The Hareenna Forest was very productive and we managed a long list of birds including **Brown Woodland Warbler**, **Cinnamon Bracken Warbler**, **African Hill Babbler**, **Eurasian Blackcap**, **African Dusky Flycatcher**, **White-cheeked Turaco**, a fleeting glimpse of **Abyssinian Crimsonwing** by some, **Mountain Buzzard**, **Crowned Eagle**, **Scarce Swift**, **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**, **Double-toothed Barbet**, **Abyssinian Oriole**, **Abyssinian Catbird**, **Montane White-eye** and **Baglafaecht Weaver**, with **Red-chested Cuckoo** heard only. Forest mammals included *Guereza Colobus*, *Olive Baboon* and *Bush Duiker*. On the way back to our hotel in the late afternoon we found a very obliging pair of **African Black Ducks** at a river crossing.

The next day we had a long but scenically spectacular journey ahead of us as we had to traverse the Sanetti Plateau and Hareenna Forest again to eventually enter the thorny lowlands of the south, ending at Negele. **Ruddy Shelduck** was a new bird on the plateau and we had good views of **Red-billed Cough**. An early morning highlight was an amazing sighting of an *Ethiopian Wolf* catching and quickly devouring a *Giant Mole Rat*. By midday we were in the lowlands and our lunch stop and several roadside stops provided a constant stream of great birds including **Salvadori's Seedeater**, **Narina Trogon**, **Black-billed Woodhoopoe**, **Black Scimitarbill**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Bateleur**, **Speckled Mousebird**, **Blue-naped Mousebird**, **Grey-headed Kingfisher**, **Little Bee-eater**, many hornbills including **African Grey**, **Northern Red-billed**, **Eastern Yellow-billed** and **Von der Decken's**, **Cardinal Woodpecker**, **Western Black-headed Batis**, **White-crested Helmet-shrike**, **Orange-breasted Bush-shrike**, **Black-crowned Tchagra**, **Northern White-crowned Shrike**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Somali Crow**, **Mouse-coloured Penduline-tit**, **Dark-capped Bulbul**, **Northern Brownbul**, **Ethiopian Swallow**, **Northern Crombec**, **Red-faced Crombec**, **Golden-breasted Starling**, **Violet-backed Starling**, **African Thrush**, **Northern Black Flycatcher**, **Vitelline Masked Weaver**, **Red-headed Weaver**, **Reichenow's Seedeater** and **Grey Tit-Flycatcher**. At one of the roadside stops we had the opportunity to walk around and closely observe the bizarre *Pyrenacantha malvifolia* (Devil's Onion) succulents with their immense water-storing tubers. The main highlight of the day was still to come, however, and late afternoon saw us marveling at the antics of several **Prince Ruspoli's Turacos!**

From our base at Negele we had ample time to explore the nearby Liben Plain, a unique and isolated patch of grassland that is home to the Critically Endangered **Liben (Sidamo) Lark**. Fortunately, it did not take long to find an obliging **Liben (Sidamo) Lark** but strangely the usually much more common Somali Short-toed Lark was absent. The plains also held **Plain-backed Pipit**, **Pectoral-patch Cisticola**, **Black-winged Lapwing**, **Crowned Lapwing**, **Temminck's Courser**, **Somali Crow** with raptors such as **Egyptian Vulture**, **White-backed Vulture**, **Black-chested Snake-Eagle**, **Lanner Falcon**, **Common Kestrel** and **Lesser Kestrel** overhead. Birds seen in the adjacent slightly more wooded areas were **White-crowned Starling**, **Yellow-necked**



**Spurfowl, Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Kori Bustard, White-bellied Bustard, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Eurasian Wryneck, Slate-coloured Boubou, displaying Foxy Lark, Ethiopian Swallow, Common House Martin, Common Whitethroat, Isabelline Wheatear, Northern Wheatear, Pied Wheatear, Common Rock Thrush and Reichenow's Seedeater.** The afternoon saw us hoping to find **Juba Weaver** and we were successful with a flock containing both females and males in full breeding plumage. A highlight of the valley was the large number of starling species and we recorded **Wattled, Shelley's, Greater Blue-eared, Golden-breasted, Superb and Magpie Starlings.** Other birds seen were **Chestnut Weaver, Purple Grenadier, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Lilac-breasted Roller, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Lesser Striped Swallow, Rufous Chatterer, Cut-throat Finch and Somali Bunting.**

The next day we set out very early for the long and birdy drive through the arid *Acacia-Commiphora*-dominated woodlands to Yabello. An early morning stop produced **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Black Cuckooshrike, African Thrush and Bare-eyed Thrush,** and further on **Crested Francolin, African Orange-bellied Parrot, Grey Kestrel, White-bellied Go-away-bird, Purple (Rufous-crowned) Roller, Von der Decken's Hornbill, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Red-and-yellow Barbet and Bearded Woodpecker** showed well. The diminutive *Günther's Dik-dik* was seen along the way. An **African White-winged Dove** was seen in the village of Melka Ghuba. We birded the Dawa River and surrounding woodlands where **African Pied Wagtail, White-browed Coucal, Brown-tailed Rock Chat, Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Yellow-vented Eremomela and D'Arnaud's Barbet** showed well. After a lunch stop more good birds were seen including **Vulturine Guineafowl, Red-naped Bush-shrike, Hunter's Sunbird, Black-throated Barbet, Pygmy Batis, Pringle's Puffback, Brubru, Acacia Tit, Dodson's Bulbul, Pale Prinia, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Rufous Chatterer, Banded Parisoma, White-browed Scrub Robin, Spotted Palm Thrush, African Grey Flycatcher, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Marico Sunbird, Variable Sunbird, Purple Grenadier and Yellow-spotted Petronia.** We entered the plains around Soda late in the afternoon and the area produced both **Grey-capped and Black-capped Social Weavers, both Red-billed and White-headed Buffalo Weavers, Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Martial Eagle, Pygmy Falcon, Kori Bustard, Buff-crested Bustard, White-bellied Bustard, Somali Ostrich, Boran Cisticola, both Somali and Taita Fiscals, and Shelley's Sparrow.** A group of swallows consisted of both Ethiopian and the endemic **White-tailed Swallow.** The plains also produced *Grant's Gazelle* and *Gerenuk.* A **Bristle-crowned Starling** was seen in the village of Dubuluk shortly before we arrived at our hotel in Yabello.

**Red-winged Starling, Lesser Masked Weaver and Speke's Weaver** were seen at the grounds of our hotel in Yabello. After breakfast we travelled to the Soda plains again and everybody was relieved when we soon found a group of **Stresemann's Bush-crows.** We also saw **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Ashy Cisticola, Three-banded Courser, Black-winged Kite, Bateleur, European Bee-eater** (heard only), **Taita and Somali Fiscal, Foxy Lark, Plain-backed Pipit and Shelley's Sparrow.** After leaving the Soda plains we spent the remainder of the day birding the *Acacia-Commiphora* woodlands around Yabello and managed to see **Shikra, Black-billed Woodhoopoe, Black-throated Barbet, Pygmy Batis, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Pringle's Puffback, Slate-**

coloured Boubou, Brubru, Lilac-breasted Roller, Acacia Tit, Dodson's Bulbul, Northern Brownbul, Somali Crombec, Rattling Cisticola, Tiny Cisticola, Pale Prinia, Buff-bellied Warbler, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Grey Wren-Warbler, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, both Rufous and Scaly Chatterers, Abyssinian White-eye, White-crowned Starling, Spotted Palm Thrush, White-browed Scrub Robin, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Collared Sunbird, Hunter's Sunbird, Marico Sunbird, Yellow-spotted Petronia, Black-cheeked Waxbill, Steel-blue Whydah, Northern Grosbeak-Canary and Somali Bunting. Donaldson Smith's Nightjar showed well during the early evening.

From Yabello we travelled to Awassa but road works along the way resulted in absolutely atrocious road conditions and our progress was further stifled by bumper to bumper traffic caused by an accident shortly after Dilla. The road that normally takes a few hours took us the whole day and we ended up arriving after five in the afternoon at our hotel on the shore of Lake Awassa. We therefore only managed to fit in an hour's birding before dark but it was very rewarding with good sightings of **White-backed Duck, African Pygmy Goose, Little Grebe, Squacco Heron, Grey Heron, Goliath Heron, Purple Heron, Great Egret, Little Egret, Hamerkop, Marabou Stork, Reed Cormorant, White-breasted Cormorant, African Fish Eagle, Black Crake, African Purple Swamphen, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, African Jacana, Common Greenshank, African Mourning Dove, Red-eyed Dove, Blue-headed Coucal, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Lesser Swamp Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Little Rush Warbler, White-browed Robin-Chat, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Thick-billed Weaver and Baglafaecht Weaver.**

The next morning we were up early to continue birding the shore of Lake Awassa and managed to find most of the birds from yesterday, and also added **Spur-winged Goose, African Sacred Ibis, Hadedda Ibis, Glossy Ibis, African Spoonbill, Great White Pelican, Pink-backed Pelican, Western Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Stilt, Baillon's Crake, Lesser Jacana** after much searching, **Grey-headed Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, Woodland Kingfisher,** large numbers of **Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, Brown-throated Martin, Sand Martin, Banded Martin, Wire-tailed Swallow, Eurasian Reed Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Red-faced Cisticola, Beautiful Sunbird, Northern Red Bishop, Red-billed Firefinch, Common Waxbill, Bronze Mannikin and Pin-tailed Whydah.** The grounds of the hotel produced **Spotted Creeper, Red-faced Crombec, Common Chiffchaff, Buff-bellied Warbler and Banded Barbet** at its nest, while a family of *Guereza Colobuses* kept us entertained. After leaving Awassa we decided to make a detour in the hope of finding **Wattled Crane.** We were successful and also managed to see both **Black Crowned and Common Cranes.** The detour unfortunately resulted in us arriving rather late at our lodge in Weliso but we did find **Bearded Vulture and Black-bellied Bustard** along the way.

The next day we departed very early to Gibe Gorge to arrive at the start of the gorge at first light. This gorge is always a major highlight as many species characteristic of Ethiopia's western lowlands can be found. We soon located **Yellow-rumped (White-throated) Seedeater, Yellow-fronted Canary, Gambaga Flycatcher, Brown-rumped Bunting, Cinnamon-breasted**

**Bunting, Green-backed Eremomela, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Redstart, Familiar Chat, Mocking Cliff Chat and Foxy Cisticola.** Down in the gorge along the river we saw **Abyssinian Roller, Vinaceous Dove, Village Weaver, Bar-breasted Firefinch, Red-billed Firefinch, African Firefinch, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Abyssinian Waxbill, Bush Petronia, Senegal Thick-knee, African Wattled Lapwing, Three-banded Plover, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Black Cuckoo (heard only), Grey-headed Kingfisher, Striped Kingfisher, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Giant Kingfisher, Western Black-headed Batis, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Red-faced Cisticola, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Black-winged Red Bishop, Red-cheeked Cordon-blue, Village Indigobird, Straw-tailed Whydah and African Pied Wagtail.** After lunch we departed for Debre Libanos with a short stop at the Sululta Plain en route that produced a dashing **Saker Falcon.**

Another early start the next day saw us travelling down the Jemma Valley for the final day of the tour. The first birding stop was along rocky slopes at the upper reaches of the Jemma escarpment where we had good views of both **Harwood's and Erckel's Francolins.** These slopes also produced **Rüppell's Black Chat, Long-billed Pipit, Singing Cisticola, Red-collared Widowbird, White-winged Cliff Chat and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting.** A sheer-sided gorge with a dramatic cliff face had flocks of **White-billed Starlings, Nyanza Swift, Crag Martin, Rock Martin and Common Kestrel,** and *Gelada Baboons* at the summit. Down in the Jemma Valley we saw **Blue Rock Thrush, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Fox Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Little Swift, Hemprich's Hornbill, Lesser Striped Swallow and Bush Petronia,** with **Woolly-necked Stork and Goliath Heron** along the Jemma River. We had good success with several **Red-billed Pytilias** preening in the streamside vegetation after a recent bath. Other birds along the river included **Bruce's Green Pigeon, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher, Mountain Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Black Scimitarbill, Black-billed Barbet, Red-billed Quelea, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Crimson-rumped Waxbill, Village Indigobird and Yellow-rumped (White-throated) Seedeater.** En route back to Addis Ababa we recorded many old favourites including **Blue-winged Goose, Wattled Ibis, White-collared Pigeon, Northern Fiscal, Erlanger's Lark, Thekla Lark, Groundscraper Thrush, Western Yellow Wagtail, Abyssinian Longclaw, Red-throated Pipit** and a nice surprise in the form of **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler,** the final new bird for the list.