SUMMARY

Our intensive 17-day tour to Ethiopia was highly successful and we managed to locate all the Ethiopian and Eritrean endemics, and ended with a total of 504 bird species.

We started the tour with Brown-rumped Seedeater, Black-winged Lovebird, Dusky Turtle Dove, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, White-backed Black Tit, Montane White-eye, Mountain Thrush, White-collared Pigeon and Wattled Ibis in the gardens of our hotel in Addis Ababa, before setting off for Debre Libanos via the Sululta Plain north-east of Addis where we found Blue-winged Goose, Rüppell’s Vulture, Rouget’s Rail, Abyssinian Longclaw and Thick-billed Raven. At Debre Libanos we found Egyptian Vulture, Cape Eagle-Owl, Mocking and White-winged Cliff Chat, White-billed Starling, Rüppell’s Black Chat and Gelada Baboon.

We then descended the Rift Valley into the Jemma Valley which yielded Harwood’s Francolin, Erckel’s Francolin, Abyssinian Wheatear, Black Stork, Fox Kestrel, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Half-collared Kingfisher and Red-billed Pytilia (next page). Then it was back onto the escarpment to Debre Birhan via highland grasslands that produced Spot-breasted Lapwing, African Spoonbill, Bearded Vulture, Verreaux’s Eagle, Common Crane, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Ethiopian Siskin and Erlanger’s Lark.

At Melka Ghebdu down the Rift Valley again we found Yellow-throated Seedeater, Crimson-rumped Waxbill, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Giant Kingfisher, Bare-faced Go-away-bird,
Rüppell's Weaver, Bruce's Green Pigeon and Mountain Wagtail. A short detour to mist-shrouded cliffs yielded Ankober Serin.

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. At Bilen Lodge we had Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Nile Valley Sunbird, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Somali Bulbul and Slender-tailed Nightjar. Nearby plains produced Somali Ostrich, Arabian Bustard, Lappet-faced Vulture, Black Scrub Robin and Black-headed Lapwing. The open thornveld savanna of the Awash National Park was a highlight and revealed White-bellied Bustard, Gillett's Lark, Abyssinian Roller, Greyish Eagle-Owl, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Grey Wren-Warbler, Green-winged Pytilia, Somali Bunting and Somali Fiscal. The lava flow below Mount Fantale produced Sombre Rock Chat.

We then travelled south to our lodge along the western shore of Lake Langano in the central Rift Valley where we had excellent views of Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Northern White-faced Owl, African Orange-bellied Parrot, White-bellied Canary, Little Weaver, Rufous Chatterer, Clapperton's Francolin, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Black-throated Barbet, Hemprich's Hornbill and Red-throated Wryneck.

The Bale Mountains National Park was another highlight with Ethiopian wolves (next page) stealing the show. Many memorable birds were seen here including Ruddy Shelduck, Spot-breasted Lapwing, Ethiopian Cisticola, Rouget's Rail, Abyssinian Catbird, Chestnut-naped Francolin, Moorland Francolin, Ayres's Hawk-Eagle, Bale Parisoma, Abyssinian Woodpecker, Red-billed Chough and Bearded Vulture. The Harenna Forest produced Scarce Swift, Mountain Buzzard, White-cheeked Turaco, African Olive Pigeon, Tambourine Dove, African Hill Babbler, Ethiopian Oriole, Sharpe's Starling and Cinnamon Bracken Warbler. Prince Ruspoli's Turaco was seen along the road to Negele.

The Liben Plain was home to Liben (Sidamo) Lark, Somali Short-toed Lark, Kori Bustard, Lanner Falcon, Plain-backed Pipit, Pectoral-patch Cisticola, Black-winged Lapwing and Somali Crow. Nearby we found Salvadori's
Seedeater, Boran Cisticola, Tiny Cisticola, Juba Weaver, Black-bellied Sunbird and many starling species including 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 Black-faced Sandgrouse, African White-winged Dove, Stresemann's Bush-crow, White-tailed Swallow, Red-naped Bush-Shrike, Somali Courser, Short-tailed Lark, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Northern Grosbeak-Canary, Pringle's Puffback, Scaly Chatterer, Pygmy Batis, Banded Parisoma, Hunter's Sunbird, 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, Hottentot Teal, White-backed Duck and the grounds of our hotel produced Spotted Creeper on the nest. We then travelled north to Bishangari Lodge along the south-eastern shore of Lake Langano in the central Rift Valley where we had great views of Yellow-fronted Parrot, African Hobby, Lemon Dove, Klaas's Cuckoo, Narina Trogon, White-cheeked Turaco, Scaly Francolin, Lesser Honeyguide, Grey Cuckooshrike, White-rumped Babbler and Banded Barbet.

Then it was down the Gibe Gorge to the western lowlands of Ethiopia where we found Yellow-rumped (White-throated) Seedeater, Foxy Cisticola, Abyssinian Waxbill, Vinaceous Dove, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Village Indigobird, Bush Petronia, Pale Flycatcher, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Short-toed Snake-Eagle and African Wattled Lapwing.
The first day of the tour started with early morning introductory birding around the grounds of the Ghion Hotel in Addis Ababa. The flowering plants in the garden attracted many Tacazze Sunbirds which were joined by Variable Sunbird, Speckled Mousebird, Montane White-eye, Common Chiffchaff, Brown-rumped Seedeter, Streaky Seedeter and African Citril. There were also Wattled Ibis, Swainson’s Sparrow, Brown Parisoma, Speckled Pigeon, Dusky Turtle Dove, Red-rumped Swallow, Nyanza Swift, Abyssinian (Mountain) Thrush, Rüppell’s Robin-Chat, African Silverbill, Bronze Mannikin, African Dusky Flycatcher, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, African Paradise Flycatcher and we found several Black-winged Lovebirds feeding on fruiting Euphorbias. The stream behind the hotel had Grey Wagtail and in the streamside vegetation we located Tawny-flanked Prinia, White-backed Black Tit, Blue-breasted Bee-eater as well as nesting Baglafecht Weavers, while White-collared Pigeons were roosting on the bridge over the stream.

At mid-morning we set off for the town of Debre Libanos, north-east of Addis. Our route took us across the grassy highlands of the Sululta Plain where birding en route produced many memorable birds such as Abyssinian Longclaw, Blue-winged Goose, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Wattled Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Black-headed Heron, Hamerkop, Western Marsh Harrier, Augur Buzzard, Tawny Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Rouget’s Rail, Black-winged Stilt, Spur-winged Lapwing and several Tringa spp waders such as Spotted Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Green Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper. Other roadside birds included Northern Fiscal, Cape Crow, Thick-billed Raven, Thekla Lark, Brown-throated (Plain) Martin, Pectoral-patch Cisticola, Red-billed Oxpecker on livestock,
Groundscraper Thrush, Red-breasted Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, Pied Wheatear, Western Yellow Wagtail, White Wagtail and Ethiopian Siskin. At one of our birding stops we saw four species of vulture consisting of Rüppell's, Lappet-faced, White-headed and Hooded, as well as other raptors such as Tawny 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 at our lodge on the Jemma Valley escarpment we bired the area and managed to record Woolly-necked Stork, Egyptian Vulture, Lanner Falcon, Fan-tailed Raven, Ethiopian Boubou, Crag Martin, Wire-tailed Swallow, Rock Martin, White-rumped Babbler, White-billed Starling, Rüppell’s Black Chat, Mocking Cliff Chat, White-winged Cliff Chat, Little Rock Thrush and Village Weaver. At one stage we were surrounded by a large troop of Gelada Baboons allowing for amazing close-up views of these fascinating primates. In the evening the call of a lone Cape Eagle-Owl was heard down the valley.

An early start the next day saw us travelling down the Jemma Valley for our first taste of birding in the Rift Valley. 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. The escarpment slopes also produced Long-billed Pipit, Singing Cisticola, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Foxy Cisticola, White-billed Starling, Abyssinian Wheatear, Rüppell’s Black Chat, Blue Rock Thrush and Crimson-rumped Waxbill. Down in the Jemma Valley we saw Pallid Harrier, Montagu’s Harrier, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Fox Kestrel, Black-headed Lapwing, Namaqua Dove, Eurasian Hoopoe, Hemprich’s Hornbill, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Common Rock Thrush, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, the localised Speckle-fronted Weaver, Red-billed Quelea, Black-winged Red Bishop with Woolly-necked Stork, Yellow-billed Stork, Great Egret and Striated Heron along the Jemma River. A small stream had many birds coming down to drink in the heat of the day, including several Red-billed Ptilias. Other birds along the stream included Black Stork, African Harrier-Hawk, African Hawk-Eagle, Three-banded Plover, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, a host of Kingfishers including Grey-headed, Striped, African Pygmy, Malachite and Half-collared, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Black-billed Barbet, Ethiopinan Boubou, African Paradise Flycatcher, Eurasian Blackcap, Menetries’s Warbler, Abyssinian White-eye, Mocking Cliff Chat, Bush Petronia, Cut-throat Finch, Red-billed Firefinch, Black-faced Firefinch, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Village Indigobird, Pin-tailed Whydah, Mountain Wagtail and Yellow-fronted Canary. En route to our hotel in Debre Birhan we bired the highland grasslands again and the two highlights of the route were a flock of over 500 Common Cranes and nearby a flock of 17 Spot-breasted Lapwings. Other highland birds were Black-winged Lapwing, a mixed flock of Swifts including Mottled, Nyanza, Little and Horus, Bearded Vulture, Verreaux’s Eagle, African Spoonbill, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Erlanger’s Lark, Thekla Lark, Groundscraper Thrush, Northern Wheatear, African Pipit and Red-throated Pipit.

The next morning saw us up early again for yet another foray into the Rift Valley down the Ankober escarpment. Our aim was a hot lowland valley through which the Melka Ghebdu stream flows. Early morning bird activity was high and our list grew rapidly as we added Black Stork, Bruce’s Green Pigeon, Bare-faced
(Brown-faced) Go-away-bird, White-browed Coucal, Abyssinian Roller, Giant Kingfisher, Northern Red-billed Hornbill, Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Black-crowned Tchagra, Isabelline Shrike, Desert Wheatear, Wire-tailed Swallow, Northern Crombec, Marico Sunbird, Shining Sunbird, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, Rüppell’s Weaver, Red-headed Weaver, Bronze Mannikin and Crimson-rumped Waxbill. Fortunately it was not long before we all had saturation views of the main target of the area, the endemic Yellow-throated Seedeater, in the streamside thickets. After a very satisfying morning we arrived back at our hotel in Debre Birhan for a well-earned lunch. The afternoon we departed for the Ankober escarpment nearby to search for the little-known Ankober Serin which only occurs at altitudes of over 2,600 m. The site was shrouded in dense mist when we arrived and we anxiously waited for the mist to clear, but fortunately our patience was rewarded with a break in the mist and we soon had our binoculars fixed on several serins foraging in the cultivated fields around us.

We then departed for the arid savanna of the Awash region of the north-eastern Rift Valley with a very productive birding stop en route at a shallow, ephemeral pan with a broad shoreline and large floodplain that attracted large numbers of birds. Here we managed to see resident species such as Spur-winged Goose, Yellow-billed Duck, Hottentot Teal, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, African Sacred Ibis, Marabou Stork, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Spur-winged Lapwing and Brown-throated (Plain) Martin; and numerous Palearctic migrants including Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Garganey, African Grey Plover, and Spur-winged Lapwing; and many many Palearctic migrants including Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Garganey, African Grey Plover, and Spur-winged Lapwing; and many species, such as Tawny Eagle and Lesser Kestrel entertained us.

Our first point of call in the Awash region was Bilen Lodge where we enjoyed getting to know the birds of the arid thornveld savanna and hot spring surrounding the lodge. Our list included Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Lichtenstein’s Sandgrouse, Nile Valley Sunbird, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Somali Bulbul, Slender-tailed Nightjar, Squacco Heron, Western Marsh Harrier, Senegal Thick-knee, Mourning Colared Dove, Ring-necked Dove, Blue-naped Mousebird, Grey-headed Batis, Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Lark, Sand Martin, Ethiopian Swallow, Grey Wren-Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Rüppell’s Starling, Superb Starling, Blackstart, African Grey Flycatcher, White-headed Buffalo Weaver, White-browed Sparrow-weaver, and Vitelline Masked Weaver, while Grivet Monkey and Salt’s Dik-dik also put in an appearance.

On the open plains nearby we soon had several great sightings of Arabian Bustard. Scanning of the plains revealed Somali Ostrich as well as Soemmering’s Gazelle, Common (Golden) Jackal and Unstriped Ground Squirrel. The plains also had Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit, Black Scrub Robin, Black-headed Lapwing, Golden-breasted Starling, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Booted Eagle and nesting Lappet-faced Vulture. 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 a whole day exploring its biodiversity. Here we managed to find

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 a whole day exploring its biodiversity. Here we managed to find...
another Arabian Bustard as well as both White-bellied and Buff-crested Bustard, but both Kori Bustard and Hartlaub’s Bustard proved elusive. We had good raptor sightings, including African Fish Eagle, Egyptian Vulture and Rüppell’s Vulture over our lodge and a stunning Ayres’s Hawk-Eagle exploding from some large trees along the Awash River. Greyish Eagle-Owl was heard in the evening while the tiny Pearl-spotted Owlet showed very well. Many other birds were also seen, including Crested Francolin, Yellow-necked Spurfowl, White-bellied Go-away-bird, Eastern Plantain-eater, Gillett’s Lark, Abyssinian Roller, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Little Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Von der Decken’s Hornbill, Red-fronted Barbet, Black-billed Barbet, Cardinal Woodpecker, Slate-coloured Boubou, Brubru, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, White-browed Scrub-Robin, Little Weaver, Grey Wren-Warbler, Green-winged Pytilia, African Pied Wagtail, Somali Bunting and Somali Fiscal. Our efforts to track down a calling Red-winged Lark proved unsuccessful but some of us did manage to see Singing Bush Lark in the process. The Park is also a haven for mammals and we had good sightings of Olive Baboon, Ethiopian (Scrub) Hare, Common (Golden) Jackal, Black-backed Jackal, Bat-eared Fox, Slender Mongoose, Common Genet, Common Warthog, 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 Little Grebe, Saddle-billed Stork, Purple Heron, Great Egret, Little Egret, Reed Cormorant, African Darter, Little Swift, Pied Kingfisher, Sand Martin, Barn Swallow and many Western Yellow Wagtails. We were fortunate to found Sombre Rock Chat at the nearby lava flow without too much difficulty. En route to our next destination we made a quick stop at Lake Koka to view more waterbirds and highlights here were African Spoonbill and Pink-backed Pelican. Our next stop on the western shore of Lake Langano provided a convenient overnight stop en route to the Bale Mountains. The grounds of our lodge was very productive and we managed good sightings of Verreaux’s Eagle-Owl, Northern White-faced Owl, African Orange-bellied Parrot, White-bellied Canary, Little Weaver, Red-faced Crombec, Buff-bellied Warbler, Grey-backed Camaroptera, African Thrush, Common Redstart, Little Rock Thrush, Northern Black Flycatcher, Rufous Chatterer, Clapperton’s Francolin, Striped Kingfisher, Black-billed Wood-hoopoe, Black Scimitarbill, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Black-throated Barbet, Hemprich’s Hornbill, Mocking Cliff Chat, Red-throated Wryneck and Slender-tailed Nightjar, while Freckled Nightjar was heard.

From Lake Langano we started gaining altitude as we travelled to the Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP). The grassy and cultivated fields en route produced Red-chested Swallow and we saw many corvids including, Cape and Pied Crow, Thick-billed and Fan-tailed Raven, and Red-billed Chough. Roadside ponds with surrounding open grassland provided some excellent birding in the form of Spot-breasted Lapwing, Rouget's Rail, Wattled Ibis, Blue-winged Goose, Red-knobbed Coot, Ethiopian Cisticola, Wood Sandpiper, Red-throated Pipit, Moorland Chat, White-collared Pigeon, Yellow Bishop and Ethiopian Siskin. We birded the Hagenia and juniper woodlands where we found a roosting African Wood-Owl but unfortunately missed an Abyssinian Owl that left its regular daytime roost just before we arrived, and could not be relocated even after extensive searching. However, the
area had many other good birds waiting for us and we connected well with Chestnut-naped Francolin, Pallid Harrier, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, Abyssinian Catbird, White-backed Black Tit, Yellow-crowned Canary, Abyssinian Ground Thrush, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Brown-rumped Seedeater and Streaky Seedeater, while being watched by Common Warthog, Bush Duiker, Bohor Reedbuck, Mountain Nyala and Menelik's Bushbuck. A mammal surprise was a Spotted Hyaena that flushed and scurried away while we were searching for Abyssinian Owl.

After a good nights rest we were looking forward to explore the foothills and Afro-alpine moorlands of the Sanetti Plateau. The St John's-wort trees on the foothills is the haunt of “Bale Parisoma” (the griseiventris race of Brown Parisoma), which gave exceptional views, while Alpine Swift, Rouget's Rail, Chestnut-naped Francolin and Groundscraper Thrush were found nearby. At the top of the plateau we found Moorland Francolin, Wattled Ibis and numerous Moorland Chats. The alpine tarns had Blue-winged Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Yellow-billed Duck, Common Greenshank, Green Sandpiper and African Snipe, with Thekla Lark nearby. Raptors were plentiful and we had many soaring Tawny Eagles, occasional Steppe Eagles, a few Augur Buzzards and Common Kestrels, a Verreaux's Eagle and a magnificent Bearded Vulture. The undoubted highlight for many was the endangered Ethiopian Wolf and we were fortunate to have great close-up views of two wolves as they moved past our vehicle. However, it was much more difficult to get decent views of their main prey, highland rodents such as Giant Mole Rat, Blick's Grass Rat and Black-clawed Brush-furred Rat, even though they were common.

The next day we had a long but scenically spectacular journey ahead of us as we had to traverse the Sanetti Plateau again, descending into the moist Harenna Forest on the southern slopes of the Bale massif to eventually enter the thorny lowlands of the south, ending at Negele. Most of the morning was spent in the Harenna Forest where we managed a long list of birds including Scarce Swift, Long-crested Eagle, African Goshawk, Mountain Buzzard, Ayres's Hawk Eagle, African Olive Pigeon, Lemon Dove, Tambourine Dove, White-cheeked Turaco, African Emerald Cuckoo, Red-chested Cuckoo, European Bee-eater, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Lesser Honeyguide, Abyssinian Woodpecker, Ethiopian Oriole, Dark-capped Bulbul, Black Saw-wing, Brown Woodland Warbler, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler, Singing Cisticola, African Hill Babbler, Eurasian Blackcap, Slender-billed Starling, Sharpe's Starling, Variable Sunbird, Montane White-eye and Baglafecht Weaver, while mammals consisted of Guereza Colobus and Olive Baboon. After lunch in the forest we continued to Negele, and added many good birds along the way such as White-bellied Go-away-bird, Abyssinian Roller, Black-billed Wood-hoopoe, Black Scimitarbill, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Double-toothed Barbet, Red-and-yellow Barbet, Northern Puffback, Northern White-crowned Shrike, Red-billed Oxpecker, Peregrine Falcon and Red-headed Weaver. The main birding highlight of the day was still to come, however, and late afternoon saw us marveling at the antics of two 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. Many Somali Short-toed Larks were encountered and it took a while for us to locate a Liben (Sidamo) Lark, but fortunately the individual was very obliging and allowed excellent views. The plains also held Kori Bustard, White Stork, Plain-backed Pipit, Pectoral-patch Cisticola, Black-winged Lapwing, Crowned Lapwing, Somali Crow, Montagu’s Harrier, Common Kestrel and Lanner Falcon. Birds seen in the adjacent slightly more wooded areas were Hartlaub’s Bustard, White-crowned Starling, Lilac-breasted Roller, White-crested Helmet-shrike, Red-tailed Shrike, Isabelline Shrike, Acacia Tit, Dodson’s Bulbul, Northern and Red-faced Crombec, Boran Cisticola, Tiny Cisticola, Isabelline Wheatear, Yellow-spotted Petronia, Reichenow’s Seedeater and Salvadori’s Seedeater. The afternoon saw us hoping to find Juba Weaver and we were successful with both a female and male in full breeding plumage. A highlight of the valley we explored was the large number of starling species and we recorded Shelley’s, Greater Blue-eared, Golden-breasted, Superb and Magpie Starlings. Other birds seen were Black-bellied Sunbird, Yellow-necked Spurfowl, Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Purple (Rufous-crowned) Roller, African Grey Hornbill, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Northern Brownbul, Spotted Palm Thrush, White-browed Scrub-Robin and Pied Wheatear.

The next day we set out very early for the long and birdy drive through the arid Acacia-Commiphora-dominated woodlands to Yabello. Our breakfast stop was the Dawa River, but not before a brief stop in the village of Melka Ghuba for African White-winged Dove. We birded the Dawa River and surrounding woodlands where Von der Decken’s Hornbill, Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Hamerkop, African Fish Eagle, Gabar Goshawk, African Hawk-Eagle, Black-faced Sandgrouse; Red-fronted, Black-throated, Black-billed and Red-and-yellow Barbets; Greater Honeyguide, Nubian Woodpecker, Pygmy Batis, Pringle’s Puffback, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Brown-tailed Rock Chat, Yellow-spotted Petronia, Somali Bunting, and the surprise of the day, a River Warbler, were found. Before and after a lunch stop more good birds were seen including Bateleur, Vulturine Guineafowl, Red-naped Bush-shrike, Pale Prinia, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Banded Parisoma, Hunter’s Sunbird and Black-capped Social Weaver. The diminutive Günther’s Dik-dik was seen along the way. We entered the plains around Soda late in the afternoon and the area produced Stresemann’s Bush Crow, Somali Ostrich, White-headed Vulture, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Wattled Starling, White-crowned Starling, Shelley’s Sparrow, Chestnut Sparrow, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Speke’s Weaver and Plain-backed Pipit. The plains also had Grant’s Gazelle and Gerenuk. Bristle-crowned Starling was seen in the village of Dubuluk shortly before we arrived at our lodge near Yabello.

The following morning and afternoon we birded the grounds of our lodge where we found more Stresemann’s Bush Crows, Pygmy Falcon, African Orange-bellied Parrot, White-browed Coucal, Klaas’s Cuckoo, Pearl-spotted Owlet with rodent prey, Shikra, Lilac-breasted Roller, D’Arnaud’s Barbet, Bearded Woodpecker, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Black-headed Oriole, Acacia Tit, Lesser-striped Swallow, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Rattling Cisticola, Rufous Chatterer, Red-winged Starling, Bare-eyed Thrush, Spotted Palm Thrush, Purple Grenadier and Black-cheeked Waxbill. In the evening we had great sightings of Donaldson
Smith’s Nightjar while Sombre Nightjar and African Scops Owl were heard calling. We also returned to the plains around Soda during the day where we found several Coqui Francolins, a group of Somali Courser, a flock of Short-tailed Larks, Taita Fiscal, Somali Fiscal, Foxy Lark, White-tailed Swallow, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Common Rock Thrush, Grey-capped Social Weaver and Bateleur. A birding stop in the Acacia-Commiphora woodlands en route produced Red-fronted Warbler, Scaly Chatterer, Pale Prinia and Northern Grosbeak-Canary.

From Yabello we travelled to Awassa and the ongoing road works made for a long driving day, although we did arrive at our hotel in time for a few hours of late afternoon birding along the shore of Lake Awassa. We spent the whole next day here and also visited the local fish market. Birds on the lake and shore consisted of African Pygmy Goose, Lesser Jacana, African Jacana, Hottentot Teal, White-backed Duck, White-faced Duck, Knob-billed Duck, Little Grebe, Glossy Ibis, Hadea Ibis, Squacco Heron, Black Heron, Great White Pelican, Pink-backed Pelican, Reed cormorant, White-breasted Cormorant, Black Crane, Allen’s Gallinule, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, Three-banded Plover, a pair of Greater Painted-snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Ruff, Temminck’s Stint, Black-headed Gull, Grey-headed Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, Malachite Kingfisher, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Brown-throated (Plain) Martin and Sand Martin. The reed beds and woodlands on the lake shore were alive with birds and we recorded nesting Marabou Stork, nesting Purple Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, African Fish Eagle, a rare melanistic Ayres’s Hawk-Eagle with kill, Hooded Vulture, Mourning Collared Dove, Black-winged Lovebird, Blue-headed Coucal, Woodland Kingfisher, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Red-fronted Tinkerbird at the nest, Banded Barbet, Double-toothed Barbet, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Western Black-headed Batis, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Willow Warbler, Lesser Swamp Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Little Rush Warbler, Red-faced Cisticola, Rüppell’s Starling,
African Thrush, Common Nightingale, White-browed Robin-Chat, Bluethroat, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Beautiful Sunbird, Thick-billed Weaver, Spectacled Weaver, Village Weaver, Northern Red Bishop, Red-billed Firefinch, Common Waxbill, Bronze Mannikin, Pin-tailed Whydah, African Citril and Spotted Creeper on the nest at our hotel.

From Awassa we travelled to Bishangari Lodge 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. Scaly Francolin was seen lurking in the forest understorey surrounding the lodge, and a pair of dashing African Hobbies flew past over the forest. The forest also produced Little Sparrowhawk, Lemon Dove, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Bruce’s Green Pigeon, Narina Trogon, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Ethiopian Boubou, White-cheeked Turaco, Grey Cuckoo-shrike, Black Cuckoo-shrike, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, Klaas’s Cuckoo, Olive Sunbird, Spectacled Weaver, Black-and-white Mannikin and Red-capped Robin-Chat. Birds seen in the surrounding woodlands consisted of White-rumped Babbler, Banded Barbet at the nest with Lesser Honeyguide in attendance, Greater Honeyguide, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Woodland Kingfisher, Black-crowned Tchagra, Northern Puffback, Red-backed Shrike, Grey-backed Fiscal, White-winged Black Tit, Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit, Black Saw-wing, Rattling Cisticola, Buff-bellied Warbler, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Rufous Chatterer, Violet-backed Starling, Northern Black Flycatcher, African Dusky Flycatcher and Bush Petronia.

The last 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, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Fox Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, Brown Snake-Eagle, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Tree Pipit, Long-billed Pipit, Pale Flycatcher, Common Redstart, Familiar Chat, Mocking Cliff Chat, Red-winged Starling and Foxy Cisticola. Down in the gorge along the river we saw Abdim’s Stork, Knob-billed Duck, Vinaceous Dove, Village Weaver, Red-headed Weaver, Red-billed Firefinch, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Abyssinian Waxbill, Bush Petronia, Spotted Flycatcher, Winchat, Lesser-striped Swallow, Rock Martin, Ethiopian Swallow, Masked Shrike, Senegal Thick-knee, African Wattled Lapwing, Namaqua Dove, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Red-cheeked Cordon-blue, Village Indigobird and African Pied Wagtail. After lunch we departed for Addis Ababa in time for our flights back home.