Ethiopia

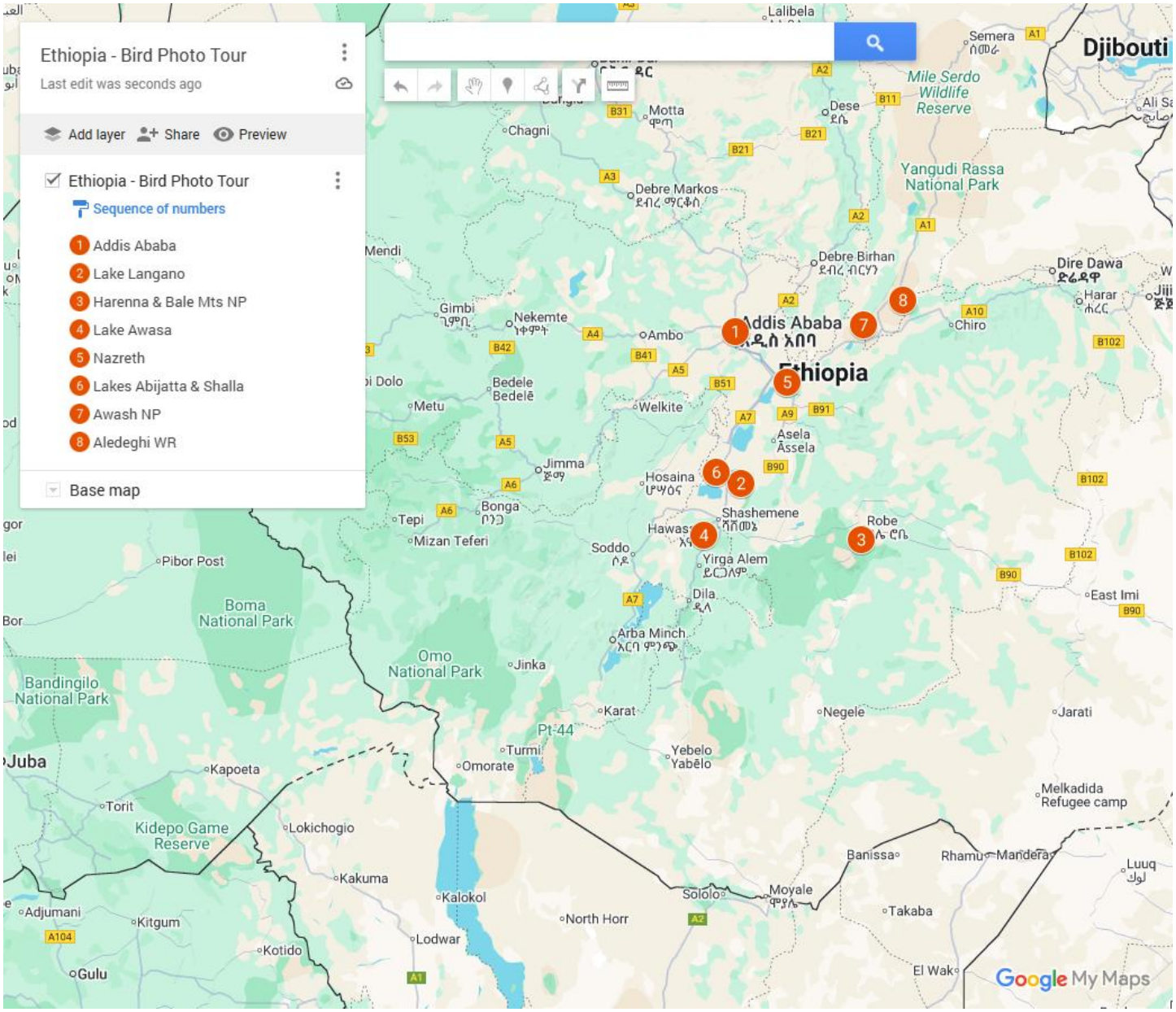
Bird Photo Tour



Rouget's Rail by David Hoddinott

Simply put, Ethiopia is hands-down one of Africa's most productive and rewarding bird photography destinations! The country's awe-inspiring scenery coupled with an array of spectacular, wonderfully photogenic and approachable birds and mammals make this a photographer's dream! Added to this a kaleidoscope of fascinating and striking cultures augment the entire experience. This amazing country supports a truly staggering volume of birds, and due to the population's beliefs and customs many species are extremely approachable affording us unrivalled photographic opportunities.

Itinerary & Map



Ethiopia Bird Photo Tour

Day 1	Arrival in Addis Ababa
Day 2	Addis Ababa to Lake Langano via various Rift Valley Lake
Day 3	Lake Langano area
Day 4	Lake Langano to Harenna Forest via Dinsho & Sanetti Plateau
Day 5	Bale Mountain National Park
Day 6	Bale Mountain National Park
Day 7	Harenna Forest to Awassa
Day 8	Lake Awassa area
Day 9	Lake Awassa to Nazreth via Lakes Abijatta and Shalla
Day 10	Nazreth to Awash
Day 11	Awash National Park
Day 12	Aledeghi Wildlife Reserve & Bilen area
Day 13	Awash National Park to Addis Ababa
Day 14	Addis Ababa and depart

Highlights

- ***Exceptional opportunities to photograph many of Ethiopia's endemic and special birds***
- ***Exploring some of Ethiopia's most celebrated national parks including Bale Mountain National Park and Awash National Park***
- ***Photographing one of the world's most endangered carnivores - Ethiopian Wolf***
- ***Experiencing a vast array of vibrant Rift Valley Lakes where it is usual to see 150+ bird species in a day***
- ***Traversing the stunning Sanetti Plateau on Africa's highest road***
- ***Seeing and photographing other endangered and threatened mammals such as Soemmering's Gazelle, Mountain Nyala, Beisa Oryx, Grevy's Zebra and Bale Monkey***

Sites in detail

Lake Chelekcheka. This is an excellent site for migrant ducks and waders and some of the lake margins also offer a variety of woodland edge type species that can often pose for good photos. Regular species encountered here include Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Garganey, Eurasian Teal, Tufted Duck, Black-tailed Godwit and Temminck's Stint. Sorting through the rafts of ducks and other migrants can be very challenging due to the



Black Crowned Crane by Clayton Burne

distraction caused by the sheer number of species moving through the scrubby vegetation near the lake edge! Common Crane often roost in staggering numbers on the far side of the water, and we may see them flying off to forage in huge, noisy flocks.

Lake Hora. The woodlands around the lake teem with birds and again it may prove difficult to keep up with the seemingly endless flow of lifers! This lake often provides excellent chances for photographing a variety of attractive woodland species given how close one can usually get to the birds. Species such as Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Black-billed Barbet, Common Redstart, Eurasian Blackcap, Red-throated Wryneck, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Rüppell's Robin-Chat, Western Black-headed Batis, Beautiful Sunbird, Rüppell's Weaver and a diverse variety of waterbirds, especially deep-water diving ducks, can be seen here.

Koka Dam & Lake Ziway. Both these sites are classified as Important Bird Areas, supporting vast numbers of both resident and migrant waterbirds. Species we will search for include the spectacular Black Crowned Crane, Pink-backed Pelican, African Darter, Intermediate Egret, Goliath Heron, Hamerkop, Yellow-billed and Saddle-billed Storks, Spur-winged and Egyptian Geese, Knob-billed Duck, the elegant African Pygmy Goose, African Fish Eagle, Western Marsh Harrier, African and Lesser Jacanas, Common Snipe, Senegal Thick-knee, Sedge Warbler, Spur-winged Lapwing, Gull-billed Tern, and Pied and Malachite Kingfishers. Strolling along the lakeshore at Lake Ziway will allow us excellent views of confiding Great White Pelican and the huge Marabou Stork, while dazzling

Northern Carmine Bee-eater, migratory White and Western Yellow Wagtails (including some of the striking *feldeggi* race) and the less colourful Ethiopian Cisticola can be seen around the lake edge. All said and done this site offers some fantastic viewing and an excellent opportunity to easily get some cracking pictures of a variety of species.

Lake Langano. Birding and bird photography in the Langano area is especially good, and we will visit some beautiful fig forest and associated woodlands that teem with birds. Here we will look for Hemprich's and Silvery-cheeked Hornbills, Lemon Dove, Narina Trogon, Lesser and Scaly-throated Honeyguides, Green Malkoha, African Hill Babbler, Double-toothed Barbet, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Thick-billed Weaver, Crested Francolin and Scaly Spurfowl, endemic Yellow-fronted Parrot, Abyssinian Ground Thrush, Green Twinspot, Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike and Red-headed Weaver. Pods of lazing Common Hippopotamuses are sometimes seen in deeper water and mammoth Goliath Herons stalk the shallows.



Abyssinian Catbird by Julian Parsons

Lake Langano to Dinsho. Roadside stops en route could produce several endemics and other species, including White-collared Pigeon, Moorland Chat, Ethiopian Thrush, Blanford's Lark, Blue-winged Goose, and the highly sought-after Spot-breasted Lapwing. Again, many of these can be very confiding and the opportunity to take good photos of the special endemics is high.

Bale Mountains National Park (Dinsho). We'll bird the high-altitude forests at the Bale Mountains National Park headquarters of Dinsho for Chestnut-naped Spurfowl, Abyssinian Owl, the secretive Abyssinian Ground Thrush, vocal Abyssinian Catbird, and the endemic White-backed Black Tit. Mammals that we may encounter include Mountain Nyala, now entirely restricted to the Bale Mountain massif, Menelik's Bushbuck and Warthog, unusual at this high altitude.

Dinsho to Harenna Forest. Soon after leaving Dinsho on our ascent to the Sanetti Plateau, we enter a Tid or Juniper Forest zone, and here we will search for African Goshawk, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, White-cheeked Turaco, the localized Abyssinian Woodpecker, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler, African Hill Babbler, Montane White-eye, and Yellow-bellied Waxbill.



Ethiopian Wolf by Clayton Burne

Bale Mountains National Park (Sanetti Plateau). This will be a day of great contrasts and amazing scenery, birding, and photography. We will depart early and ascend the Bale Mountain massif onto the Sanetti Plateau, which lies between 3,800m and 4,377m (12,540 and 14,444ft) above sea level.

Upon reaching this unique plateau, we will be driving on Africa's highest road - passing close to the summit of Ethiopia's second highest mountain. This habitat is termed 'Afro-alpine moorland' and is characterised by Giant Lobelias that tower like monolithic giants over the rich tussock grasslands and extensive cushions of yellow Everlasting flowers. This site is an Important Bird Area of immense significance, supporting seven globally threatened species and nearly all of Ethiopia's highland biome species. The plateau holds the only Afrotropical breeding populations of Ruddy Shelduck, Golden Eagle and Red-billed Chough. We will also search for Wattled Ibis, Chestnut-naped Spurfowl and Moorland Francolin, Rouget's Rail (particularly common and confiding here), Blue-winged Goose, Spot-breasted Lapwing, African Snipe, Wattled Crane, Thekla's Lark, Abyssinian Longclaw, Red-breasted Wheatear, Moorland Chat, and flocks of endemic Ethiopian Siskins.

These grasslands are estimated to support an incredible biomass of 4,000kg (8,800lb) of rodents per hectare.

This obviously attracts an array of raptors, and we should see Augur and Mountain Buzzards and, if we are lucky, the rare Golden Eagle. They share this abundant food source with the plateau's most celebrated resident, the Ethiopian or Simien Wolf, crowned with the unenviable title of "the world's rarest canid". Watching these vibrantly coloured animals, most closely related to the Grey Wolf exhibiting their hunting prowess whilst pouncing on Giant Mole Rats (another endemic to the Sanetti Plateau) is surely among Africa's greatest wildlife experiences. We should enjoy excellent photographic opportunities in this unique montane habitat.

Harenna Forest. This is the largest intact forest block in Ethiopia, and the largest protected Afro-alpine Forest on the continent. It still supports populations of Lion, and the only surviving forest-dwelling African Wild Dogs. Although it's unlikely that we will see either of these species, the descent through this breathtakingly beautiful, moss-draped forest is inspirational. Here we will search for the uncommon Ayres's Hawk Eagle, African Olive



Spot-breasted Lapwing by David Hoddinott

Pigeon, Lemon and Tambourine Doves, African Emerald Cuckoo, Abyssinian Woodpecker, Narina Trogon, Brown Parisoma (represented by a subspecies endemic to this National Park), Abyssinian Crimsonwing, African Citril and Yellow-crowned Canary.

Lake Awassa. A birding stroll around the well wooded lake shore will likely reveal African Spotted Creeper, Little Weaver, Black-billed Wood Hoopoe, Double-toothed Barbet, Woodland Kingfisher, huge Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, the attractive Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike, Western Black-headed Batis, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Mourning Collared Dove, Grey-backed Fiscal, Northern Puffback and Bronze Mannikin. Reedbeds in the vicinity support Greater Painted-snipe, Black Crake, African Swamphen, Blue-headed Coucal, Red-faced Cisticola, Lesser Swamp Warbler and Common Waxbill. The woodland also supports families of Grivet Monkey, though it is the regal Guereza (Black-and-white Colobus) that will certainly steal our attention as they leap through the trees, their shaggy pelts and long tails trailing behind. This site again offers a raft of species, many of which are confiding and offer themselves up as excellent photographic subjects.

Time permitting, we may visit the Lake Awassa fish market. This large lake is particularly rich in fish, and the fishermen gut their catch and discard the waste around the market. This, in turn, attracts large numbers of grotesque Marabou Stork and other birds. Photographic opportunities are unrivalled. We should also see Great White Pelican, White-breasted and Reed Cormorants, Hamerkop, African Sacred Ibis, Black-headed, Grey-hooded and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and sometimes the massively equipped Thick-billed Raven squabbling over the fish remains.



Abyssinian Ground Hornbill by Glen Valentine

Lakes Shalla & Abijatta. We'll visit these close, but very different lakes. The shallow and brackish Abijatta, and the extremely deep, blue Shalla (once a volcanic crater and now home to several bubbling sulphuric hot springs).

We plan to bird the lake shores and their surrounding woodlands and forests, where Clapperton's Spurfowl, Little Rock Thrush, African Thrush, Buff-bellied Warbler, Red-faced Crombec, Beautiful Sunbird, Rüppell's Starling, Red-billed Oxpecker, Red-billed Firefinch, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Black-winged Lovebird, Abyssinian Wheatear, White-winged Black Tit, Black-billed Wood Hoopoe, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Greyish Eagle-Owl, Northern White-faced Owl, Slender-tailed Nightjar, Bearded Woodpecker and Masked Shrike occur in dry Acacia woodland throughout the area, while Black-billed, Banded and Double-toothed Barbets, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, White-rumped Babbler and Ethiopian Boubou are resident in well-forested areas.

At Lake Abijatta, in particular, we hope to find flocks of Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Northern Shoveler, Southern Pochard, Cape Teal, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Eastern Imperial and Long-crested Eagles, Grey Kestrel, Little Ringed, Common Ringed, Kittlitz's and occasionally Caspian Plovers, many species of Palaearctic waders, Pallas's and Lesser Black-backed Gulls (amongst several other species of gulls and terns), Collared Pratincole, Little Bee-eater, family groups of the wonderful Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Sand Martin and African Pipit. Mammals we may see here include Grant's Gazelle, Oribi and possibly Spotted Hyena.

Lake Beseka lava field. We will make a concerted effort to find, and possibly even photograph, the very rare and localised Sombre Rock Chat, Striolated Bunting and Blackstart near Lake Beseka, while we also have a decent chance of seeing Hamadryas Baboon sitting atop the edge of escarpments in large troops, soaking up the early morning sun.



Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse by Keith Valentine

Awash National Park. We'll bird the Awash River and Kirayawa Gorge, exploring riverine forests, wetlands, Acacia woodlands, savannah grasslands, rocky hills, cliffs, and escarpments. The park boasts a bird list of around 460 species and we will make an effort to find, amongst many others, Egyptian Vulture, Bateleur, Tawny and Greater Spotted Eagles, African Harrier-Hawk, Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Scissor-tailed Kite, Shikra, Helmeted Guineafowl, Common Buttonquail, the nocturnal Three-banded Courser, mega Star-spotted Nightjar, Eastern Plantain-eater, the diminutive Pearl-spotted Owlet and giant Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Blue-naped Mousebird, gaudy Purple, Lilac-breasted and Abyssinian Rollers, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Greater Honeyguide, Wire-tailed Swallow, Red-winged, Gillett's and Singing Bush Larks, White-browed Scrub Robin, over-wintering Common Rock Thrush, localised Ashy Cisticola, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Grey Wren-Warbler, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Grey-headed Batis, Mouse-colored Penduline Tit, Slate-colored Boubou, Northern White-crowned Shrike, Northern Puffback, Somali Fiscal, Nile Valley and Marico Sunbirds, Grey-headed, Orange-breasted and Rosy-patched Bushshrikes, Fan-tailed Raven and Red-billed Quelea.

With some luck, we'll find the dazzling Northern Carmine Bee-eater perched atop the backs of striding Kori or Arabian Bustard, a seldom observed phenomenon. In fact, this is bustard kingdom deluxe and nowhere else on

the planet can boast the chance of no less than six bustard species in one day (Kori, Arabian, Buff-crested, White-bellied, Black-bellied and Hartlaub's)!

Mammals are also well represented and we may see Aardwolf, Leopard (unlikely), Beisa Oryx, Aardvark, Soemmering's Gazelle, elegant Gerenuk (the giraffe-proportioned relative of the widespread Impala), Abyssinian Hare, African Wild Cat, Black-backed Jackal, Spotted and Striped Hyenas, Greater and Lesser Kudus, Warthog and Salt's Dikdik.



Arabian Bustard by David Hoddinott

Aledeghi Wildlife Reserve. Here we will search for Somali Ostrich, Martial and Short-toed Snake Eagles, Yellow-necked Spurfowl, the rare Arabian Bustard (perhaps the best location on earth for this species), Black-headed Lapwing, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark. Occasionally highly nomadic species such as Pale Rock Finch or Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark move into the area as well. Depending on conditions, we may also see several mammals such as Golden Jackal, Beisa Oryx, Grevy's Zebra and Soemmering's Gazelle.

This land is inhabited by nomadic Afar tribesmen who we will see dressed in their fine white cotton tunics, bedecked with traditional jewellery, daggers and spears. The men sport a unique bushy hairstyle, while women and girls are also extravagantly attired and adorned. They adhere strictly to their ancestral ways of tending their camel and goatherds and roaming throughout this inhospitable land.

Tour Grading & Key

Photography		Generally excellent. Many species are approachable, habitat & lighting are often conducive. No dedicated hides.
Overall Ease		Birding is undemanding but long travel days, low food diversity & some basic accommodations are taxing.
Accommodation		Variable. Modern & comfortable in the Rift Valley. Average to simple elsewhere.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks on flat ground. Predominantly roadside birding. Short walks in forest habitat.
Vehicles / Roads		4x4 Landcruiser style vehicles. Numerous long drives. Unsealed roads are variable, sealed roads have potholes & livestock. Dust is more prevalent in winter.
Birding Ease		One of the most enjoyable & prolific birding destinations in Africa. Many species are approachable & provide good visuals in open conditions.
Annoyances		Food diversity is limited in many areas, accommodation can be simple. The arid regions can be hot.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 14 of the main tour
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve & historical site entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It can be very hot in some areas, whilst the highland areas can get cold especially at night. Light rain may be experienced in the Bale Mountains.
- Our visits to the Bale Mountains (Sanetti Plateau) ascends to 4,200m (13,780ft) above sea level, but very little walking is done at this altitude.
- There are several long, all day drives on this Ethiopia trip, but we will take regular rest stops and birding stops to break the long journeys. Although lengthy, these drives are scenic and full of interesting waypoints.
- Road conditions in Ethiopia are highly variable and unsealed, dirt roads can be quite bumpy and very dusty, something that is simply not avoidable. It is advisable to bring a handkerchief/buff that can be tied around your face to cover your nose and mouth. Although an extreme case scenario, persons with back troubles should probably bring back-braces to ensure comfort on bumpy roads.
- The itinerary may be changed during the tour itself if security situations make this necessary.
- Accommodation varies from very comfortable in the greater Rift Valley, to basic but comfortable at some sites such as Awash. The lodges/hotels we use are typically the best available.
- Some hotels & restaurants have unpleasant, dirty bathrooms.
- Mosquito nets are present at some lodges, but many are shredded or unusable. It is advisable to bring your own.
- The food in Ethiopia is quite basic and mostly consists of local cuisine only. We will be able to enjoy western cuisine at some hotels in the Rift Valley only.
- We will have several 'bush breakfasts and lunches' on the side of the road whilst in good birding areas. This will occur mainly in the more remote areas of the country and will be prepared by our able drivers.
- Special dietary requirements (other than vegetarians) are for all intents and purposes impossible to cater for in Ethiopia.

Bird Photo Tours

- Our Bird Photo Tours are a hybrid between our Classic birding tours and dedicated photographic tours. You don't have to be a professional photographer or have the biggest lens; this is for everyone with an interest in photography and birding. Whether you're using a bridge camera or the latest body and prime lens, our aims are the same.
- These tours are not aimed at seeing the most species possible on the route, rather taking time to photograph key targets and any other interesting species we may find. Naturally, the overall species list will be lower than a comparable birding focused tour.
- Whilst we may use blinds, feeders and hide setups on some of these tours, we will not be spending an entire day nor even several hours fixed in one spot.
- These tours are suitable for photographers who prefer opportunistic photography over entire days in a hide.
- Our leaders will assist in helping everyone secure good photographic opportunities and advise as much as they can on camera setup. However, they are not professional photographic tour leaders.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day, and you may arrive at any time in advance of our introductory group dinner. The tour will conclude at Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa after breakfast on day 14.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa (IATA: ADD) is the main port of entry for international flights for this tour and is well serviced by most of the world's major airlines.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.