Ethiopia

Central Birds & Wildlife (Relaxed)

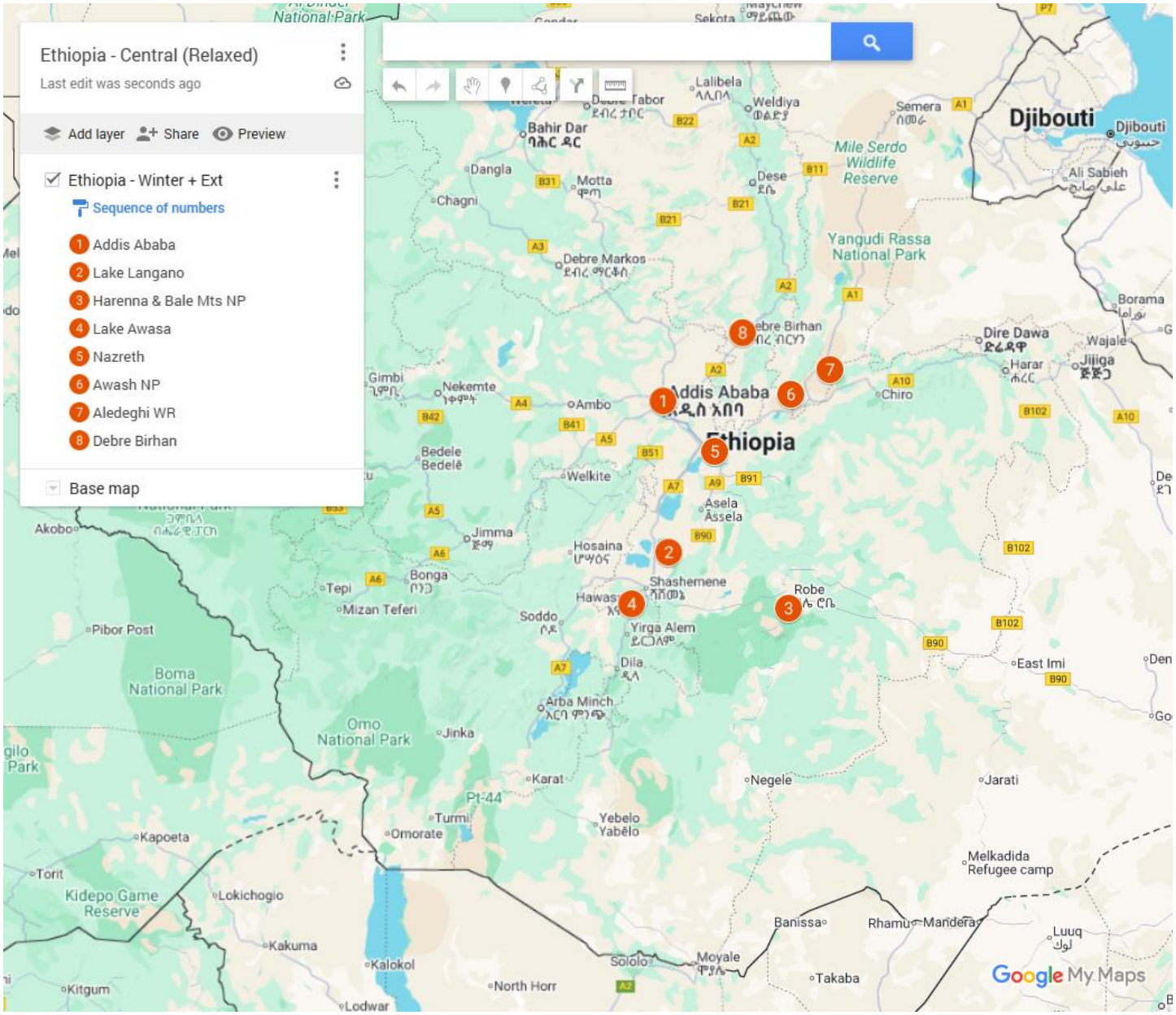


Black Crowned Crane by Clayton Burne

Simply put, Ethiopia is hands-down one of Africa's most productive and rewarding birding destinations! The plethora of endemic birds to be found here, many of which are very tame and confiding, is further complimented by a rich assemblage of forest and savannah species, while the influx of Palaearctic migrants at the time of this tour all combine to make for a truly bird-filled adventure! To boot, you'll be exposed to the kaleidoscope of cultures that grace this ancient land, all these factors combining to ensure a fascinating experience of not just the country's birds, but also its amazing mammals – including Ethiopian Wolf and troops of the incredible Gelada. The spectacular landscapes and scenery, fascinating history, good road infrastructure, diverse cultures and astonishing wildlife make Ethiopia an essential expedition for all birders, and for many of our guides this remains one of their top destinations on the African continent!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival into Addis Ababa**
Day 2	**Addis Ababa to Lake Langano**
Day 3	**Lake Langano area**
Day 4	**Lake Langano to Harenna Forest**
Day 5	**Bale Mountain National Park – Sanetti Plateau**
Day 6	**Bale Mountain National Park – Harenna Forest**
Day 7	**Harenna Forest to Lake Awassa**
Day 8	**Lake Awassa to Lake Ziway, via Lakes Shalla and Abijatta**
Day 9	**Lake Ziway to Nazreth**
Day 10	**Nazreth to Awash National Park**
Day 11	**Awash National Park**
Day 12	**Awash National Park to Aledeghi Wildlife Reserve**
Day 13	**Aledeghi Wildlife Reserve to Debre Bihran via Melka Gebdu & Gemasa Gedel**
Day 14	**Debre Birhan to Addis Ababa via the Jemma Valley & depart**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Birding sites in detail



White-collared Pigeon by Greg de Klerk

Addis Ababa. The capital of Ethiopia has a few open spaces and parks that can be birding. Noteworthy species that may be seen include White-backed Black Tit, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, Brown-rumped Seedeater, Tacazze Sunbird, White-collared Pigeon, Wattled Ibis, and a host of raptors overhead, numbering both Egyptian and Hooded Vultures.

Lake Chelekcheka. This is an excellent site for migrant ducks and waders. 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 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 also teem with birds and again it may prove difficult to keep up with the seemingly endless flow of lifers! 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.



Blue-breasted Bee-eater by Greg de Klerk

Lake Langano. Birding 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



Spot-breasted Lapwing by Greg de Klerk

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.

Lake Langano to Dinsho. Roadside stops en route could produce several endemics and other species, including White-collared Pigeon, Moorland Chat, Groundscraper Thrush (of the distinctive, endemic race *simensis*), Blanford's Lark, Blue-winged Goose, and the highly sought-after Spot-breasted Lapwing.

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.

Bale Mountains National Park (Sanetti Plateau). This will be a day of great contrasts and amazing scenery and birding. 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,



Rouget's Rail by Adam Riley



Ethiopian Wolf by Meg Taylor

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.

Bale Mountains National Park (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 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



Yellow-fronted Parrot by David Hoddinott



Soemmerring's Gazelle by Clayton Burne

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.

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.

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 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.



Black-winged Lovebird by Adam Riley

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



Kori Bustard & Northern Carmine Bee-eater by Clayton Burne

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 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.

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.



Gelada Baboons by Greg de Klerk

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



Harwood's Spurfowl by Clayton Burne

extravagantly attired and adorned. They adhere strictly to their ancestral ways of tending their camel and goatherds and roaming throughout this inhospitable land.

Doho. This increasingly arid landscape is a haven for dry country resident and migrant species. Watercourses and rocky outcrops harbour Eurasian Sparrowhawk, African Collared and European Turtle Doves, the range-restricted, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Lark, Common Nightingale, Blue Rock Thrush, Rufous-tailed and Black Scrub Robins, Boran Cisticola, skulking Upcher's and Menetries's Warblers, groups of Red-fronted Warbler, Ruppell's Starling, Black-crowned Tchagra, Southern Grey Shrike, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, and Chestnut-crowned and White-browed Sparrow-Weavers.

The area has numerous hot springs which we may be able to avail of, whilst this evening, an optional night walk may reveal Greyish Eagle-Owl or Slender-tailed Nightjar.

Melka Gebdu track. The typically hot and dry Melka Gebdu track hosts another scarce endemic, the Yellow-throated Seedeater. This area is also excellent for Yellow-breasted Barbet, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Bare-faced Go-away-bird and several species of sunbirds. Red-billed Pytilia, a rare and tricky endemic has also been recorded here.

Ankober Escarpment. The escarpment road is one of the most picturesque in the entire country. Along the drive, we'll make the odd roadside birding stop for the endemic Blue-winged Goose, Abyssinian Longclaw, Blanford's Lark and Thick-billed Raven. A stunning gorge near Gemasa Gedel is an excellent site for the localised Ankober Serin, a rare and elusive Ethiopian endemic. Discovered only in 1976, they survive along a few kilometres of this wind blasted grand escarpment, as do Gelada Baboons, also known as Lion-headed Baboons. This densely pelted, shaggy baboon is endemic to Ethiopia, and the males can often be seen flipping back their lips in a show of dominance. These animals have the closest vocal repertoire to humans of any mammal, pronouncing all consonants and four vowels! They forage on the grasslands above the escarpment and roost on ledges of inaccessible cliffs at night. Other possible species to be found her include Ethiopian Siskin, Streaky Seedeater, Moorland Chat, White-billed Starling, Bearded Vulture, Verreaux's Eagle, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, Peregrine Falcon, the seldom recorded Somali Starling and Long-billed Pipit.



Ethiopian Siskin by David Hoddinott

Jemma Valley. An early departure is essential to be at our chosen site when the endemic Harwood's

Spurfowl is at its most vocal, thus providing our best opportunity for seeing this elusive species.

The Jemma River is one of the main tributaries of the Blue Nile and it cuts a 700m (2,300ft) deep gorge through the landscape. The habitat in the gorge is dominated by Acacia woodland, while the steep sides provide habitat for some excellent endemic birds. We will concentrate our search here for Rüppell's Vulture, Verreaux's Eagle, African Hawk-Eagle, Augur Buzzard (dark morph birds are commonly seen here), Lanner and Peregrine Falcons, Erckel's Spurfowl, Nyanza Swift, Hemprich's Hornbill, Red-rumped Swallow, Abyssinian Wheatear, the endemic and localised Rüppell's Black Chat, endemic White-winged Cliff Chat and its more familiar cousin, Mocking Cliff Chat, endemic White-billed Starling, elusive Yellow-rumped Seedeater and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting.

We will have a picnic lunch at the river and bird the surrounding woodlands for Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Klaas's Cuckoo, Black-billed Barbet, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Foxy and Singing Cisticolas, African Paradise Flycatcher, Masked, Woodchat and Isabelline Shrikes, Swainson's Sparrow, Bush Petronia, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Red-collared Widowbird, Black-winged Red and Yellow Bishops, and both Crimson-rumped and Abyssinian Waxbills. With a good dose of luck, we may stumble upon the quiet and inconspicuous Red-billed Pytilia, one of the trickier endemics that is regularly found in the Jemma Valley.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Birding is undemanding but some long travel days, low food diversity & some average accommodations are taxing.
Birding Ease		One of the most enjoyable & prolific birding destinations in Africa. Many species are approachable & provide good visuals in open conditions.
Accommodation		Variable. Modern & comfortable in the Rift Valley to average elsewhere.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks on flat ground. Predominantly roadside birding. Short walks in forest habitat.
Vehicles / Roads		4x4 Landcruiser vehicles. Some long drives mostly on sealed roads, prone to having many potholes & livestock. Dust is more prevalent in winter.
Photography		Good to excellent. No dedicated hides. Many species are approachable, habitat & lighting are often conducive.
Annoyances		Food diversity is limited in many areas.

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 dinner on day 14;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve & 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.

Our Relaxed series of tours are designed to focus on having an enjoyable holiday with a bird and wildlife focus. Where possible; we have reduced or removed long drives, single night stays and poor/rustic accommodation. We have also sought to reduce or remove difficult hikes, narrow/muddy trails and otherwise oppressive environmental conditions. Early starts and night birding are mostly optional, and we will not spend much time searching for difficult and/or skulking species. These tours are not suitable for hardcore birders and listers, or dedicated photographers.

- **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.**

- 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.
- Accommodation varies from very comfortable in the greater Rift Valley, to average outside of this area.
- 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 remote south and north 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.

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 a farewell dinner in the evening of 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.