

# Ethiopia

29 October–15/21 November 2010

## Participants

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**Stresemann's Bush-crow**

**Led by** Solomon Berhe ,Vaughan and Svetlana Ashby

I'm not sure how it happened, but a unanimous decision was made during the tour that I should write the trip report as I "made notes", even though nearly all the other participants were more experienced and better birders than me. Maybe that is why I got the short straw (I'm now sort of thinking sucker!). Anyway this report will be an account of the birds and experiences as I saw them and noted at the time. It is by no means a fully comprehensive list seen by the group as a whole. Each day I will mostly only record birds new to the trip list although we obviously saw lots of the more common birds all of the time. Indeed it was generally agreed that Ethiopia offered unrivalled views of numerous birds and every stop guaranteed quality bird sightings

**Day 1:** The group flew from Heathrow and arrived at Bole Airport, Addis Ababa early in the morning after a trouble free flight albeit on a rather ancient airplane.

**Day 2:** Solomon was there to meet us at the airport and after all the introductions and money changing were completed birding began before we even cleared the terminal building, Black (Yellow-billed) Kite, Pied Crow, a Tawny Eagle and distant vultures were all floating around outside and a few Speckled Pigeons were strutting their stuff in the car park as we boarded the bus. Vaughan was straight on the case calling Thick-billed Raven, Black Saw-wing and Hooded Vultures as we drove into the city heading for the Ghion Hotel. It was still early in the day so as soon as we were allocated rooms and abandoned our suitcases we gathered at the front entrance for our first foray north of Addis to the high altitude Sululta Plain, but not before we ticked off Tacazze Sunbird, Olive (Mountain) Thrush and Broad-ringed White-eye in the hotel grounds. A quick stop for bananas then as we approached the plains a dozen or so Common Cranes flew over the bus. Moorland Chats seemed to scatter in all directions as we started our walk down the short grassland leading to a small pool and stream. Birds started to come thick and fast, the first being the prized endemic Erlanger's Lark flitting around with a few Thekla Larks followed by Rüppell's Chat, Red-breasted and Cyprus Wheatears, then our second endemic, Blue-winged Geese out on the water alongside Egyptian Geese. Western Marsh-harrier, Augur Buzzard, Sand Martins and Wire-tailed Swallows were all in evidence over the marsh with a Black-headed Heron and Green

Sandpiper in the margins. Walking back past a small copse and stone wall we had good views of African Dusky Flycatchers, Groundscraper Thrush, Common Bulbul (*schoanus*) with no white on the cheeks and no yellow vent. Finally from here we saw the near endemic and attractive White-collared Pigeon, which proved to be fairly common in the highlands. After this fantastic start we boarded the bus to catch our breath for a while but only drove a few kilometres further north to where a small stream crossed under the road. Here we saw our first of many Lammergeiers with White-backed Vultures soaring high over a feeding flock of the endemic Wattled Ibis. A speeding female Lanner Falcon flew past followed by a Eurasian Hobby sat on telephone lines with a Montagu's Harrier in the distance. Cape Rook, Yellow Wagtails and Isabelline Wheatear were all around on the grass. Red-rumped Swallows, Rock and Plain Martins filled the air around the pools.

We then drove further north to Debre Libanos, an immense gorge with spectacular views. Here we ate our packed lunch of egg sandwiches but were constantly distracted by the amount and variety of birds around us. Black (Yellow-billed) Kites were everywhere giving superb views and calls soon went up for Rüppell's, Lappet-faced and White-headed Vultures, Steppe and Verreaux's Eagle. Fan-tailed Ravens kept swooping down for scraps of bread. Later we walked towards the Portuguese Bridge down into the gorge itself and picked up small flocks of White-billed Starlings followed by Rüppell's Chat, White-winged and Mocking Cliff-chats and a single Little Ringed Plover. We then encountered a troop of Gelada or lion-headed Baboons (*Theropithecus gelada*) around the cliffs doing what baboons do. We made our way back to the bus via some scrubland and new birds continued apace, Northern Crombec, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Speckled Mousebird, Common Fiscal, Common Kestrel, Red-billed Firefinch, Baglafaecht Weaver, Variable Sunbird and many Greater Blue-eared Glossy-starlings.

On our return journey to Addis Ababa a rather tentative "were those ducks on that river?" resulted in us screeching stop and a stealthy walk back along the road. Lo and behold a pair of African Black Ducks (a normally difficult to find bird) plus Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, African Stonechat, Northern Wheatear and many Barn Swallows. By now we were ready for dinner and a good nights sleep but we were all pleased with a total of nearly 70 birds on this our first day in Ethiopia.

**Day 3:** At first light we were keen to be out in the hotel grounds and saw Wattled Ibis on the lawn, Tropical or Ethiopian Boubou, Brown-rumped Seedeaters, Tree Pipit, and an African Goshawk sitting on its nest plus many Red-eyed Doves and Dusky Turtle-doves. We went in for a good breakfast before loading up our 4-wheel drive vehicles that Birdfinders had equipped with walkie-talkie radios to make sure we all kept in close contact whilst travelling from site to site. Then we were off south to Debre Zeit, Teleka Marsh, where the list started to grow rapidly again. On the cultivated approach to the marshes we saw Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Village Indigobird, African Citril, Vitelline Masked-weaver, Plain-backed Pipit, Pied Wheatear and Orange (Northern Red) Bishop. A perched Augur Buzzard posed beautifully for photos. On the water we picked out Little Grebe, White-backed and Comb (or Knob-billed) Ducks, Red-knobbed Coot, Fulvous Whistling-duck and Northern Shoveler. We then walked along a track with tall hedgerows and picked out several Rüppell's Glossy-starlings, a Red-backed Shrike, and a couple of African Mourning Doves whilst a flock of Red-billed Queleas kept disappearing in a cultivated field. On reaching an extensive muddy reed area we saw Sacred and Glossy Ibis with many Marabou Storks, Hamerkop, Great White Pelican, Black-winged Stilt, African Spoonbill, Cattle and Little Egrets, Squacco Herons, Long-tailed Cormorants, Ruff, African Snipe and Wood Sandpiper. Overhead we saw African Harrier-hawk, several African Fish-eagles and an Egyptian Vulture. Further out into the wet marshes Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns were fishing plus a Spur-winged Goose and some Spur-winged Lapwings.

After a couple of hours, we dragged ourselves away and drove on to Koka Lake bridge but were stopped in our tracks when a radio call went out to say a group of weird but impressive Abyssinian Ground-hornbills were walking close to the road. After many photographs we continued on to the lake bridge where we saw a Dark Chanting-goshawk, Black-chested Snake-eagle, and some Chestnut-backed Sparrow-larks. The bridge was very busy with speeding traffic so we moved on to Ziway for a restaurant lunch stop with soup and spaghetti on the menu and mature trees outside which delivered Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Swainson's Sparrow, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Common Redstart and a Woodland Kingfisher. We were realising that wherever we stopped and for whatever reason birds were always around. We moved around to Ziway lakeshore and found

Fork-tailed Drongo, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Grey-headed Gull and Buff-bellied Warbler but because it was a Sunday this recreation area was crowded with people who seemed to be fascinated with us, so we drove further along a lake-side track. Here we got Little Bee-eater, Black-winged Lovebird, Malachite Kingfisher and African Darter. We also came across a large group of waders which included African Jacana, Common Greenshank, Temminck's Stint, Kittlitz's Plover, Black-tailed Godwits, a Little Stint, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Ringed Plover and a solitary Pacific Golden-plover, a very rare bird inland. On the dry banks we saw Cut-throat, Superb Starlings and some Eurasian Hoopoes, Great (White-breasted) Cormorants and White-winged Terns were flying around the margins. Finally we saw several African Pygmy-geese and an African Openbill. We then had a short drive to Awasa and our overnight hotel Lewi.

**Day 4:** After a comfortable night we left for our first location, Lake Awasa fish market, next to some parkland with mature trees. On pulling into the parking area we were surrounded by cheeky Vervet Monkeys scampering around. Above us were many noisy Silvery-cheeked Hornbills bouncing around in the treetops. A Spotted Creeper was quickly seen followed by Banded and Double-toothed Barbets with Red-headed Weaver, White-browed Coucal and a lone Blue-headed Coucal low down in the undergrowth. Feeding near to Lake Awasa we picked up Hadada Ibis, Senegal Thick-knee, Saddle-billed Stork and Goliath Heron deep in the reeds. The shout then went up for Grey Woodpecker, which turned out to be Grey-headed after some study. Then co-incidentally a Nubian Woodpecker flew in with a Eurasian Golden Oriole. Also flitting around in the same tree were Grey-backed Camaropteras, but we were suddenly distracted by a speeding flock of Slender-billed Starling that gave us the run around for a while. As we left to walk along the exposed lakeside track towards the university buildings I saw a Red-faced Crombec. The reeds along the lake soon gave us Hottentot Teal, White-faced Whistling-duck, Common Moorhen, Intermediate (Yellow-billed) Egret and several African Jacanas but not a Lesser Jacanas, one of Andy's target birds, (for which he would unsuccessfully search for on many further occasions) nor Black Heron much wanted by Jeff. On walking back to the road to meet the cars we saw several Beautiful Sunbirds, Bronze Mannikin and Grey-backed Fiscal. Jeff wanted to support the local economy by purchasing a few peanuts that children were selling. On completing the deal he finished up with a bag containing several kilos (but at a good price!).

We drove on south to Wondo Genet and booked into the Waba Shabali Hotel that had a well-established garden with more Green Vervet Monkeys (*Ceropithecus pygerythrus*) and Guereza or Abyssinian Black-and-white Colobus Monkeys (*Colobus guereza*). After lunch and a short siesta we all walked along up a hilly track up to mature woodland, and very quickly we were ticking off new birds again with Bruce's Green-pigeon, Rameron Pigeon, and Lemon and Tambourine Doves. We spotted our first White-cheeked Turaco, Northern Puffback, Mountain Wagtail, Pin-tailed Whydah, Dark-headed Oriole, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Grey Cuckoo-shrike and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird. Several endemic squawking Yellow-fronted Parrots were zooming about. Then Vaughan called out an elusive African Hill-babbler for a few seconds before it dived back into cover. Andy got his scope on a Crowned Hawk-eagle nest across the valley and after much discussion as to whether it was on the nest, movement proved that indeed it was. A superb male Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike and a Klaas's Cuckoo were also seen. We came across a Scaly Francolin as we walked back to the hotel for dinner in the fading light. We then finished the day off by finding an African Scops-owl by torchlight.

**Day 5:** After a comfortable night we were out at first light to walk the local trails again and came across a large troop of Olive Baboons (*Papio anubis*) feeding in a field. We headed for a stream passing many local villagers taking a free bath in one of the hot-spring pools (embarrassing when you're armed with binoculars!) and found our target birds: Half-collared Kingfishers fishing, plus a small noisy flock of White-rumped Babbler. Along the lower track we had Little Rock-thrush, Red-winged Starling, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and Broad-billed Roller. Overhead a Greater Spotted Eagle soared high above us and further up the hill we had good views of Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike and Klaas's Cuckoo as well as a pair of Brown Woodland-warblers. We had some filling vegetable soup for lunch and a free afternoon, so a few of us hired a local guide Nuru to look for Narina Trogon. We had to take a rather long trek up some steep cattle trails but unfortunately one of the group slipped and fell down, badly twisting his ankle. A couple of local youths cut a walking stick from the bush and helped him back to the hotel. The rest of us continued up the mountain for a while seeing Willow Warbler,

Green-backed Honeyguide Northern Black-flycatcher, Blue-spotted Wood-dove and African Paradise-flycatcher (white morph). After a considerable search, Nuru located a pair of these colourful trogons by imitating their call and they came close enough for us to take some good photos. As another long day drew to a close we trekked back to the hotel for dinner as dusk fell. I was happy in the knowledge that my personal trip list had just topped two hundred birds in the first four days.

**Day 6:** Today was to be a long drive to the Bale Mountains but with plenty of good bird watching road stops planned. The first stop produced a smart Hemprich's Hornbill followed by a small flock of Black-winged Lapwings in roadside fields. A brief comfort stop was watched by a very showy Peregrine which was totally unconcerned by our presence. We soon paused again to admire a few Red-billed Choughs as we gained altitude, with flocks of Black-headed Siskins along the roadside. Solomon then drew the vehicles up at another of his special sites, this time to see a Cape (McKinder's) Eagle-owl at its daytime roost in a small ravine. Some money changed hands and Solomon explained that the surrounding villagers had formed a co-operative to safeguard the owls and the site so that other birding groups could have the same experience as we had. This is active conservation at its best, directly benefiting the local people who are doing a great job looking after their own wildlife and the environment. After getting many kilometres under our belts and gaining more altitude, we pulled over for a picnic lunch at a small pool that was fed by a marshy stream and from where we soon picked out two more endemics: Spot-breasted Lapwings and Rouget's Rails together with Grey Heron, Yellow-billed Duck and Three-banded Plover all near the water.

After some heavy cheese and egg sandwiches we decided to take a walk along the road with moorland scrub on both sides. We were accompanied by flocks of Yellow Bishops, a lone Abyssinian Longclaw and a couple of Red-throated Pipits. Mammals were now starting to show themselves, Big-headed or Giant Mole Rats (*Tachyoryctes macrocephalus*) and Ethiopian Narrow-headed or Meadow Rats (*Stenocephalemys albicaudata*) were popping in and out of their burrows while a family of Warthogs (*Phacochoerus africanus*) crossed the road ahead of us. Away from the road, Mountain Nyala (*Tragelophus buxtoni*) and Bohor Reedbuck (*Redunca redunca*) grazed happily but were too far away for us to take any photos. Soon we were back in the 4x4s and heading for the Bale Mountains National Park HQ. Whilst booking in, a few of us managed to catch sight of a calling Abyssinian Catbird. The park guides then took us to see a rare and elusive Abyssinian Owl perched up inside a thick pine tree. We had to lie down on the grassy slope to get decent views so well was it hidden. Then we made tracks to get our third good owl of the day, African Wood-owl, near some park buildings stopping only for a skittish White-backed Black-tit flitting through the trees. After staring at the wrong tree for several minutes, the African Wood-owl was eventually located in another tree close by and gave amazing views. We continued along rough roads to the good standard Wabe Shebelle Hotel in Goba. Unfortunately there was a power cut but we managed to dine, call the bird log and retire to bed by candlelight.

**Day 7:** Because we were now at approximately 2800m we had a relatively cold night and I needed to wrap up well to walk through the hotel gardens at dawn. We saw several Yellow-crowned Canaries by the entrance and in the car park had several Dwarf or Somali Ravens depending on which world list you follow. After breakfast, we climbed much higher to the Sanetti Plateau in the heart of the Bale Mountain National Park proper. On the way, we made stops for cracking views of the usually skulking Cinnamon Bracken-warbler, a perched Mountain Buzzard and a Golden Eagle drifting overhead. The air on the high plateau was crisp, clean and cold and we were soon treated to a great view of the rare Ethiopian Wolf, formerly known as Simien Fox (*Canis simensis*). The view got better and better as it walked to within a few metres of our vehicles. Our good fortune didn't end there, a pair of magnificent Wattled Cranes posed for more photos and a couple of us saw an Ethiopia Highland or Starck's Hare (*Lepus starcki*). As we continued driving past the giant lobelia's and high moorland flora, bird diversity was quite low but Moorland Chats and Black-headed Siskins were abundant and we added Ruddy Shelduck to our lists. We then descended the south side of the plateau to the Havenna Forest stopping to admire a family group of Chestnut-naped Francolins. In the forest, we found the endemic Abyssinian Woodpecker, Black-eared Wheatear and even a well-travelled Lesser Whitethroat. Returning back up to the plateau, we were pleased to find Moorland Francolin, a difficult species which we were worried we may have missed. We had a longish drive back to our hotel but stopped to enjoy further great looks at Ethiopian

Wolf and find the endemic Bale (Brown) Warbler. We finally arrived back at our cosy hotel to find it complete with electricity!

**Day 8:** We had a four-hour drive along some bumpy tracks planned for today, mainly to find Salvadori's Seedeater at Sof Omar. During the journey, we made some profitable stops to add a number of new species including a stately Kori Bustard strutting its stuff and some Crested Francolins close by. As we lined up along the verge with binoculars and 'scopes lots more birds were called: Vinaceous Dove, African Black-headed Oriole, White-browed Coucal, White-crested Helmetshrike and huge numbers of House Martins on the electrical wire, resting during migration. We finally approached the ravine and assembled above the steep sides to start our search by carefully walking down through the scrubby vegetation. After a slow start, only getting Yellow-spotted Petronia and a few Red-billed Hornbills during the first half hour, things suddenly picked up to a fever pitch with many of us not knowing what to look at first: Pygmy Batis, Somali Tit, White-bellied Go-away-bird, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Northern Brownbul, Blackstart, White-rumped Shrike, Cardinal Woodpecker, Brown-tailed Chat, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Black-billed Wood-hoopoe, Shining Sunbird, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and Greater Honeyguide and all followed in short order. Then Jeff called a bird that flew into a tree and Vaughan quickly confirmed he had the Salvadori's Seedeater in the 'scope if anyone wanted it! Soon our attention was distracted by a flock of Bristle-crowned Starlings that swooped in to pick ticks from a herd of goats. Overhead we got Booted Eagle and African Hawk-eagles soaring high with many Common Swifts. A short walk across the road was less productive in the heat of the day although we did add Grey-headed Kingfisher and Slate-coloured Boubou on the way back to the vehicles. On the drive back to Goba, we stopped for Ring-necked Dove, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Abyssinian Roller, Pale Flycatcher, Black-crowned Tchagra, Red-collared Widowbird, Isabelline Shrike, Black-shouldered Kite and finally we had to assist a Leopard Tortoise across the track before it got squashed by a passing 4x4!

**Day 9:** Today was to be a long rugged driving day, 280km and no tarmac. We had, however, some exciting target birds to go for along the way. Firstly we drove up and over the Sanetti Plateau again, only stopping for new birds, the first being a smart green and yellow African Emerald Cuckoo. At the same time, we also saw a Bush Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*) scamper into the undergrowth. Not long afterwards a Giant Forest Hog (*Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*) trotted across the road in front of car number one. Further stops produced Winding Cisticola, European Bee-eater, Black-billed Barbet, Long-crested Eagle, Laughing Dove and Eastern Chanting-goshawk. Egg and cheese sandwiches for lunch again, (but with a real treat – bananas and oranges to follow!) with an African Grey Hornbill hanging around for scraps. Having travelled on for a while we halted abruptly to look through a feeding flock of starlings that turned out to be mostly Shelley's Starlings, with a few Golden-breasted Starlings amongst them that some of us managed to get on but Martin for one missed the call before they disappeared. Purple Grenadier, White-headed Buffalo-weaver, Abyssinian Scimitarbill and a pretty Red-and-yellow Barbet quickly followed.

We next pulled up on a small bridge where Solomon spoke to the gathering children and then announced that they knew where the next star endemic bird was hiding. Peering up into a large fruiting tree we all saw the splendid endemic Prince Ruspoli's Turaco plus a Spotted Morning-thrush, Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike, Orange-bellied Parrot and an Unstriped Ground Squirrel (*Xerus rutilus*) was creeping around us. We drove on happy with yet another endemic well and truly ticked and as darkness fell, we arrived at the hotel in Negele. The rooms were OK but most other facilities had to be shared, a real basic African experience.

**Day 10:** As the tour progressed, we rotated the vehicle seating arrangements every couple of days, which worked very well with everyone having a turn in the lead vehicle. Today was another early drive to the Liben Plain to find a tricky endemic lark. As we started to walk the plain more new birds were sighted, Ethiopian Swallow, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, Temminck's Courser, Long-billed Pipit, Pectoral-patch Cisticola then a magnificent Martial Eagle cruised right over the top of us. It was decided that we fan out so we could systematically search larger areas of this sparse flat grassland. We were stretched far and wide when Vaughan's whistle blew to alert everyone that he had found a Sidamo Lark. This striking and critically endangered lark tried hard to lose itself among the grassy tussocks but eventually gave us all good views. Sadly, a French couple

had employed a local guide called Aziz who had a total disrespect for the species future by breaking down a fence into a protected area to look for the bird. We rebuilt the fence but it was extremely distressing that some birders are more interested in seeing a bird and guides more interested in earning money than safeguarding the species' future. Yet more birds were still to come: Lesser and Common Kestrels, White-crowned Starling, Shelley's Rufous Sparrow and Rüppell's Weaver.

After the hotel restaurant lunch, we drove out to Yabello Wildlife Sanctuary, a scrubby savannah area and again the birds just kept coming, Namaqua Dove, Marico Sunbird, Stout Cisticola, Spotted Flycatcher, Foxy Lark, Gabar Goshawk, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Somali Bunting, Grey Wren-warbler, Red-fronted Barbet, Pygmy Falcon, Rufous Chatterer, Rosy-patched Bushshrike, Little Weaver, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Brubru and after a little chasing around, we finally caught up with White-bellied and Buff-crested Bustards plus a tiny antelope called a Salt's Dik-Dik (*Madoqua saliana*).

**Day 11:** Today was another longish drive to the southern town of Yabello and we got off to a good start with Lilac-breasted and Rufous-crowned Rollers followed by Yellow-necked Spurfowl running in the road. Next came the Dowa River where we walked to try and find the scarce White-winged Collared-dove. It was a hot and dusty trek but enlivened up by sightings of Striped Kingfisher, Eastern Yellow Hornbill, Bush Petronia, Chestnut Weaver, European Honey-buzzard, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Collared Sunbird, Shikra, White Wagtail and several sightings of another target, the regional endemic Salvadori's (Juba) Weaver. Time was slipping by and apart from a couple of quick flyovers as doves shot past at high speed we had no clear sightings of our main target. The heat was building towards noon so we rested in the shade by the river where we sat having to consider dipping on this bird when Martin said "what about those two doves over on the far bank". Wow! A pair of White-winged Collared-doves in full view; excellent. We marched back to the vehicles in double quick time to get the air-con on for a while to cool off.

During the afternoon, we pulled over at a large tree supporting a massive weaver colony which turned out to be Grey-capped and Black-capped Social-weavers, all very busy feeding and nest building. In the same tree were Blue-naped Mousebirds and a Pale Prinia. No sooner had we got going again when Svetlana spotted a group of Vulturine Guineafowl casually walking into the bush and whilst we photographed them, and a D'Arnaud's Barbet came in and perched in full view. Just before it got dark, one last stop gave us White-bellied Canary, Chestnut Sparrow and the final endemic of the day, Stresemann's Bush-crow. Yabello's nice hotel hit the spot after a long day on the road but we still had energy to try for nightjars close-by but only saw a White-tailed Mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) in the spotlight.

**Day 12:** Because we had driven a long way south and dropped down into the Rift Valley, we were up and about for a pre-breakfast walk knowing that new birds would be quite likely and we saw Bare-faced Go-away-birds, White-billed Buffalo-weaver, Lesser Masked-weaver, Helmeted Guineafowl, White-browed Scrub-robin and a few Lesser Striped Swallows feeding across the grassy slopes adjacent to the hotel. After our al-fresco breakfast in the warm African sun, we were off again to explore the surrounding acacia scrubland that continued to supply us with more new birds for the trip list. In open grassland, we found both Somali and Taita Fiscals as well as Somali Short-toed Larks. Further on, Vaughan identified a difficult cisticola as Tiny Cisticola and a lark as Gillett's Lark before more showy birds were found: Three-streaked Tchagra, Northern Grosbeak-canary, Grey-headed Batis and Bare-eyed Thrush. We continued to ride and walk this open savannah area. Although Solomon kept calling White-tailed Swallows it was a while before we all got definitive views of this endemic.

We headed out into the Mega-Yabello Sanctuary for lunch and here we encountered our only light rain of the tour as we watched Short-tailed Larks. Mottled Swifts fed high above us and Grant's Gazelle (*Gazella granti*) grazed in the background. Sharp-eyed Andy stopped the convoy again to 'scope at least three Somali Coursers he had spotted at some distance away from the road and a White-tailed Swallow showed well perched on a twig but Vaughan was thwarted in his attempts to a perched photo. Solomon took us to see a porcupine's nest in a hollow but they were not at home, although we did collect some quills and flushed several Yellow-winged Bats (*Lavia frons*). I then saw a Gerenuk or Giraffe Gazelle (*Litocranius walleri*) plucking leaves from some higher acacia type thorny bushes whilst several Black-cheeked Waxbills. Heading back north towards Yabello, we searched the acacia scrubland again finding Red-fronted Warbler, Black-throated Barbet, Scaly

Chatterer and Mouse-coloured Penduline-tit. We then flushed a Sombre Nightjar several times but Red-naped Bushshrike eluded us despite everyone's best efforts and hearing it sing several times. We had to admit defeat and return to the hotel for dinner. Later in the evening, some of us went out spot-lighting and Vaughan picked up the eye-shine of a Donaldson-Smith's Nightjar. We managed to approach it to take many really good close-up photos. Then on the way back to the hotel, we also saw the nocturnal Black-backed Jackal (*Canis mesomelas*) and Cape Hare (*Lepus capensis*) by torchlight.

**Day 13:** We headed north today towards Lake Langano, over 300km, but mostly on proper sealed roads, the first we had seen in over a week. We first pulled into some local craft basket stalls for Svetlana to buy some unnecessary crafty type objects! Jeff split his big bag of nuts so he distributed them out amongst a crowd of children who had gathered around our vehicles. Ironically they were probably the same kids who had sold them to him on day 3, how mad! Cars one and two became separated in Awasa and they saw Great Sparrowhawk and Purple Gallinule near the lake, but no Lesser Jacana for Andy again but the rest of us enjoyed stunning close-up views of Northern Carmine Bee-eaters. After lots more driving we arrived at Hotel Wabi Shabella to find no water in the rooms despite being next to an enormous lake! The wholesome dinner and a few cold beers was some compensation though.

**Day 14:** We were out early again along the lakeside to a now closed and empty resort nearby, but arrangements were made with the security staff for us to enter into the surrounding scrub area that lead to a cliff escarpment known for its good birds in the past. It didn't disappoint as we picked up Black-headed Batis, Rattling Cisticola, Black Scimitarbill, Abyssinian Black Wheatear, Masked Shrike and a brilliant Verreaux's Eagle-owl perched in a tree close to the rock face. A couple of us had to take cover from a low flying francolin but a few had good views identifying it as a Clapperton's Francolin. Sadly, we couldn't relocate it for everyone to see. As we walked back to the car to nip back for breakfast we flushed a number of Slender-tailed Nightjars that fluttered around us and landed again in cover. After sneaking through the undergrowth for a while however, we got on to see at least one well. Our breakfast was cut short when the resort staff found a pair of roosting Greyish Eagle-owls for us to relish.

We then drove to the far side of Lake Langano, mostly consisting of reed beds and marshy woodland. Here we saw Striated Heron, Black-crowned Night-heron, Great White Egret, African Pygmy-kingfisher, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, White-winged Black-tit, Grey-backed Fiscal, Spectacled Weaver, Crimson-rumped Waxbill, Collared Pratincole, Grosbeak Weaver and Yellow-mantled Widowbird. During our lunch break by the lake, a Lesser Honeyguide was found in a large tree. Moving on down a long and bumpy track to Bishangari Lodge, we enjoyed nice cold drinks before splitting into two groups to explore the adjacent woodland where everyone finally got good views of Lemon Dove as well as Rameron Pigeon and many other common birds. Our second night at Wabi Shabella, still with no water until we were each issued with a full jerry can to wash with. Ironically, they are building more units here without the infrastructure to provide adequate water supplies to the existing units and despite the lakeshore being only a few metres away, a typically African attitude!

**Day 15:** Today our journey was from Lake Langano to Awash National Park but just as we got going Jeff in the lead car stopped everyone to look at a flock of Red-billed Oxpeckers taking a free ride on some feeding donkeys. We continued driving north along the road from the Kenyan border to Addis Ababa until we called at Lake Ziway for our second visit as it was much quieter this time with less people around. There were lots of waders and the common waterbirds about but the only new one to our list was a Sedge Warbler. Our next stop at Koto Dam produced two Black Crowned-cranes feeding in the marsh together with many other birds that we had seen on our first visit. For lunch, we pulled into a restaurant in Nazret town that did a western type cheese burger and chips, very much enjoyed by some whilst others went native and ordered Injera with all the trimmings. We loaded up again and were on our way when Jeff called a halt on the radios again, this being his best sighting yet; a strawberry farm selling punnets to passers-by! Because we had enjoyed very little fruit during the trip, we possibly bought too many and were eating strawberries for the next couple of days!

The next site we visited were lava fields to look for the endemic Sombre Chat. After a game of hide and seek for about an hour, we finally all got good views together with Blackstart and Pied Wheatear whilst our only Yellow-billed Stork flew over. We clambered aboard the vehicles yet again and headed for Awash National Park entrance gate where we saw Woodchat and Southern (Steppe) Grey Shrikes perched high on the acacia trees. Drive along the park tracks, we spotted many Soemmerring's Gazelle (*Gazella soemmerringi*) on the savannah type land and then a photogenic Southern Oryx or Gemsbok (*Oryx gazelle*) standing in the clearing for us all to snap away at. One of the most amazing sights however, was two Northern Carmine Bee-eaters perched on a Kori Bustard's back! As we approached Awasa Lodge, the noise of the mighty waterfall became louder and louder and could still be heard even when we were in the eco-friendly resort cabins and tucked up in bed for the night.

**Day 16:** We were up and out at dawn again for a quick scout around before breakfast and watched a pair of Eastern Grey Plantain-eaters waking up, flocks of Village Weavers moving out for the day and Crested Francolins scurrying around a campsite. On our morning park drive we stopped several times, recording Ashy Cisticola, Tawny Pipit and Eastern Paradise-whydah. Then Lyn spotted the last barbet needed to complete the set, Yellow-breasted Barbet, sitting up in a sunny position allowing us to take a few photos. We then found a pair of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse walking along the track ahead of us. Sandgrouse are among Lyn's favorite birds so she was having a good day.

Leaving the park, we drove east through Awasa town on the main route to Djibouti. The road was full of trucks and in places badly damaged so heavy was the traffic. We arrived at the Bilen Lodge track in good time however, and after driving several kilometres down a badly eroded track were finally rewarded with our target bird; Arabian Bustard, spotted by Andy (who else!) in the distance. Vaughan then directed an off-road expedition so we all had really good views of it strutting around the scrubland. The day got even better on the way back with great views of some Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse near the track, then waddling off into the bushes. We then drove a little further east to a view-point across the Atilege Plain that Solomon knew. A Brown Snake-eagle sat atop a tree by the roadside and we set up the 'scopes to look at the scattering of antelopes with many more bustards, sandgrouse and harriers. Several big dark bushes turned out to be Somali Ostrich feeding! We then had a fast drive back to Awash National Park for a good dinner and a couple of beers accompanied by traditional dancing in the dark.

**Day 17:** We got off to a good start today when a pair of Little Sparrowhawks flew past us whilst we were having breakfast, they settled in a tree near Awash Waterfall for us to get a 'scope on. Slowly driving in convoy towards the park exit, car one spooked a sleek African Swallow-tailed Kite, (much to Solomon's excitement), which flew a long way over the park scrub, but Vaughan had seen the distant tree it had landed in so it was decided we would 'yomp' out in the sun for a closer look. Although we had trouble locating it again, Andy struck gold again and 'scoped the now pair of Swallow-tailed Kites perched in full view, great birds and after some careful stalking, great photos. As we traipsed around the bush keeping one eye open for any lions that may be about new birds still kept coming, Flappet Lark, Yellow-bellied Eremomela and an exceedingly photogenic Rosy-patched Bushshrike. Crossing the road into the northern section of the park, the eagle-spotters called Lesser-spotted and Wahlberg's eagles; Svetlana, Vaughan and Solomon all agreed the ID for a change! There were plenty of birds here including a Wahlberg's Honeyguide and Andy was on a roll now and found a pair of Heuglin's Courser roosting between two bushes. He backed off and signaled us all into the best viewing position for these special birds. Solomon had to pay a fine for staying in the park beyond our time limit but we all thought the birds were worth every extra burr.

We continued towards Addis Ababa stopping for lunch again at Nazret. Here we said a formal thank you to our drivers for doing such a fantastic job over the last two weeks driving us several thousand kilometers on some very difficult roads and dirt tracks. As the main tour was coming to an end we took some group photos. Solomon announced that he had one last stop up his sleeve for us at a public park near a lake close to Addis Ababa where we saw an Osprey and Pink-backed Pelican among many others of course. We arrived back at the Ghion hotel in plenty of time for our last supper and to say goodbye to those going home, plus a big



thank you to Vaughan and Svetlana for a great trip and getting almost all of the difficult birds for us with 28 endemics and many more regional endemics in the bag.

**Day 18:** An early flight to Bahar Dar via Lalibela where Viv, Tony and myself nearly got off the plane by mistake! Fortunately Solomon saved the day by recalling us and we flew on for another 20 minutes to Lake Tana. With just a short drive to the hotel we were soon out birding in the gardens where we inspected a small colony of Epauletted Fruit Bat (*Epomophorus labiatus*) and along the lakeshore where we picked up a Long-legged Buzzard gliding over before lunch. In the afternoon, Solomon organized a minibus for our 35 kilometre trip to the Blue Nile Falls along bone-shaking roads. It was all worth it when we got there however, because they certainly had the wow factor just by the sheer size and volume of water tumbling over the precipice, throwing up clouds of spray into the gorge. No wonder for the first time in Ethiopia we encountered lots of tourists here with cameras snapping away. We had to search for our endemic target bird, White-throated Seedeater, however. Solomon heard one call but it still took us a long time to track it down as it hid high in the branches then kept flying fast from tree to tree. Around the falls we also saw many of the now common Lesser Blue-eared Glossy-starlings, Green-backed Eremomela and two African Yellow White-eyes. Then Solomon pointed out an Eastern Imperial Eagle soaring around over the hills. We were ready for the buffet dinner after the long rickety drive back in the dark, but once again endemic mission accomplished.

**Day 19:** We went out for an early morning walk along the lakeside path again and came across two Black Crakes pecking their way along the gravel path followed by a lone male Black Bishop perched on the tall reeds. After breakfast a local guide with a nice boat picked us up for our Lake Tana trip. We motored out passing some very large reedbeds to circumnavigate two islands, looking for African Finfoot. Despite not finding any we had a very pleasant trip and did see several flocks of Yellow-crowned Bishops and two Wattled Lapwings as well as several Hippopotamus laying low in the water. We landed further along the lakeshore to walk around some cultivated gardens where an assortment of vegetables were flourishing. As we approached a marshy area Tony asked if Lesser Moorhen were possible in this area. Solomon said yes as a breeding migrant, although they are very rare. He then became very excited as Tony pointed out the one he was looking at! It was a Lesser Moorhen and it stood on a grass tussock close enough for me to take a photo with my compact camera and a nice lifer for Solomon. Remarkably, later we saw another adult with a juvenile, which showed that they had bred in this marsh. We also bagged a Purple Heron on the way back to Tana hotel for lunch.

Later in the afternoon, Solomon took us to a busy road bridge where we watched at least a dozen White-rumped Swifts feeding over the river. They were probably nesting underneath judging by the way they kept disappearing into the ironwork. The evening saw us walking out to a local restaurant in Bahar Dar which was yet another interesting African experience, goulash soup and fried fish fresh from the lake, all eaten al-fresco with about a million flying insects for company.

**Day 20:** Today we flew back to Addis Ababa and were met by the two Andy's for the last part of the trip. We loaded up one of the new 4x4 with Solomon squeezed into the back jump seat we drove north-east from Addis to Lami. I saw quite a few Nyanza Swifts around the tall buildings as we left the city. On a high moorland road, we saw a large flock of Ortolan Buntings feeding very close to the road. We then took a scenic break overlooking the Jema valley and started a systematic search for, and eventually found, the regional endemic target Erckel's Francolin as it started to call and give itself away. Hotel Tigist in Lemi was not such good news, basic to the extreme, but there was no other option in this area and if you want to see the birds then sometimes you have to endure basic conditions. We ate spaghetti in a shack type café watched by bemused locals before locking ourselves into the cell-like rooms for the night. We all survived the night unscathed however, to bird another day and moved on early.

**Day 21:** This morning we descended into the Jema valley to a place where our next target, Harwood's Francolin had been found before. With the considerable help of lots of local children we eventually got onto a pair with two young sitting up for us to lock our 'scopes onto. Very satisfied, we continued into the valley to a river bridge for a sandwich breakfast. Here we found Speckled-fronted Weavers and Black-winged Bishops

before taking a walk beside the rocky river where we got close to a European Wryneck, Common Waxbill, Giant Kingfisher, House (Little) Swift and Blue Rock-thrush. We were preparing to move on when Andy came up trumps again and fixed his 'scope on a perched chestnut-red Fox Kestrel. Next came one more of Solomon's key road stops and we collected a very nice African Quailfinch feeding near a muddy stream. We arrived in Debre Birham and checked into Gete Wami's hotel (Famous Ethiopian 10 and 15,000 metre runner who won many world-class races, beating Paula Ratcliffe several times in tight finishes) and enjoyed a large roast lunch with all the trimmings. We required a little snooze before birding in the late afternoon; must be an age thing! Although we re-acquainted ourselves with many of the now familiar birds we didn't see anything new for the list.

**Day 22:** Today we ventured out in search of yet another endemic, Ankobar Serin. Armed with sandwiches again, although a little cheese or pickle would have been nice to accompany the tomatoes that looked terribly lonely in my bread roll on their own. Anyway, mission accomplished, as soon as we hit Solomon's Debre Sina Mountain spot we got onto at least half a dozen serins that were pecking along the slopes near the road; such a pity it is so unremarkable in appearance. We immediately turned around to target number two, the Yellow-throated Seedeater. We had about 60 kilometres of rough track to the site, which was located coincidentally very near to the town of Ankobar. After about 15 kilometres along the track we had a flat tyre which Andy, the driver, changed in a jiffy. As you may have guessed however, a few kilometres further along we had another tyre blow. This time, with no spare and in the middle of nowhere Solomon, who was not in the least fazed by this, flagged down a passing truck who kindly transported Andy and the tyres back to Debre Birham. If he managed to get them fixed OK and then got straight back to us we would have about a four-hour wait, but with three wheels on our wagon we were going nowhere. Not to be downhearted, Solomon marched us back to the village and introduced us to a real Ethiopian experience of a teahouse. The hostess with an attached baby plied us with a local spirit called Arack that tasted weird but strong, whilst the tea was brewing. Some of us drank in order not to appear to be rude but Viv 'accidentally' spilled hers on the straw floor! The tea was also weird but after all the spirits I needed to lie on the grass for half an hour as my legs didn't feel quite right (age thing again!) Anyway, time slipped by nicely and we talked about birds and weather it was too early for storks to be passing through as we hadn't seen any. I had said that Black Stork has been my bogey bird for years of looking for them (albeit, fairly casually). At this point Solomon said "what about these two flying over?" As we were stuck here for a while, I chased them for a couple of miles down the valley to have a good view and to get some pictures. By the time I returned back up the road the wagon was fixed and we were on our way again, still hoping for our next endemic seedeater before it got dark. We drove through some staggering mountain scenery to reach the area around four o'clock. This bird proved to be much more flighty than other seedeaters, it kept teasing us with quick sightings then flitting into thick cover. We had to clamber around in the undergrowth for 45 minutes until it finally sat up and showed its yellow throat and rump well. Now happy, we managed to get all the way back without further incidents.

**Day 23:** We arrived back at the Ghion Hotel in the morning and birded the grounds for the rest of the day. Nothing new was seen and we were transported back to the airport for our flight back home in the early hours of day 24. The flight home was uneventful and passed quickly, for me at least, as I spent the whole flight writing this report – 7 hours 50 minutes. How sad is that?

**Pat Wilkes**