

# Kenya

23 July – 10 August 2003

Participants:

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**Jackson's Francolin**

**Leaders: Steve Easley and Vaughan Ashby**

**Day 1:** Morning departure from London via Abu Dhabi to Nairobi.

**Day 2:** Arrival in Nairobi at 06.00 and even as we were waiting for our luggage to be loaded into the vehicles we made a start with the birdlist with Speckled Pigeon, African Palm-swift, Little and White-rumped Swifts, Red-winged Starling and Pied Crow. Next we made the short transfer to the Maxwell Adventist Academy in the south west suburbs of the city. En route, the most notable birds were Marabou Storks perched in trees by the side of the road and a Long-crested Eagle. Our excellent breakfast at the academy was interrupted with the arrival of a Grosbeak Weaver on the bird feeder! After breakfast we took a walk around the extensive grounds, where a number of excellent birds were seen: Gabar Goshawk, Spotted Thick-knee, Crowned Lapwing, Dusky Turtle-dove, African Mourning, Red-eyed and Ring-necked Doves, Fischer's Lovebird, Speckled and Blue-naped Mousebirds, Abyssinian Scimitar-bill, Red-billed Hornbill, Grey Woodpecker, Greater Honeyguide, Rock Martin, Wire-tailed, Lesser Striped and Red-rumped Swallows, African Pied Wagtail, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Grey Wren-warbler, Brown Warbler, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Southern Black Flycatcher, Cape and Rüppell's Robin-chats, Olive Thrush, Northern Pied-babbler, Red-throated Tit, Kenya Violet-backed, Scarlet-chested, Bronze, Malachite and Variable Sunbirds, White-breasted White-eye, African Black-headed Oriole, Brubru, Slate-coloured and Tropical Boubous, Fork-tailed Drongo, Superb and Violet-backed Starlings, Kenya Rufous Sparrow, White-browed Sparrow-weaver, Baglafaecht Weaver, Red-billed Firefinch, Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, Streaky and Kenya Yellow-rumped Seed eaters, African Citril and Brimstone and White-bellied Canaries, what a start! Thompson's Gazelles seemed oblivious to our presence, whilst at the small pond in the grounds, Long-tailed Cormorant, Black-headed Heron, Hadada and Sacred Ibises, Hamerkop and Pied Kingfisher were added to our lists. After preparing our packed lunches, we spent the rest of the day driving the Magadi road down into the Great Rift Valley. By making numerous stops we added a number of other species, including Black-shouldered Kite, Eastern Chanting-goshawk, Augur Buzzard, Tawny Eagle, Namaqua Dove, White-browed Coucal, Common and Mottled Swifts, Rufous-crowned Roller, African Grey and Von der Decken's Hornbills, Black-throated, Red-fronted and Red-and-yellow Barbets, Cardinal and Nubian Woodpeckers, Fawn-coloured and Short-tailed Larks, Yellow-throated Longclaw, African and Long-billed Pipits, Little Rock-thrush, Ashy, Rattling and Singing Cisticolas, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Red-fronted Warbler, Banded Warbler, African Grey Flycatcher, Spotted Morning-thrush, Red-backed Scrub-robin,

African Stonechat, Capped Wheatear, Chinspot Batis, Common and Taita Fiscals, White-rumped Shrike, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Cape Crow, Hildebrandt's Starling, Chestnut and Parrot-billed Sparrows, Yellow-spotted Petronia, Grey-headed Social-weaver, Black-necked Weaver, Vitelline Masked-weaver, Red-billed Quelea, Black-faced Waxbill and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. At the end of our first day we had accumulated a list of 127 species in a very relaxed manner, an excellent introduction to Kenya and its birds.

**Day 3:** After breakfast, we drove north through Nairobi until we reached our first stop, Thika Falls. Walking through the hotel grounds we descended the steps to the waterfall and river below. Here we found our only Brown-hooded Kingfisher and White-eared Barbet of the trip, together with Mountain Wagtail, Black-tailed Oriole, Long-tailed Fiscal, Black-backed Puffback and Red-billed Buffalo-weaver. After a welcome cup of coffee, we moved on to some rice fields where numerous birds were present. Amongst the numerous Great, Intermediate, Little and Cattle Egrets we found several Squacco-type herons, one of which turned out to be a Madagascar Pond-heron. Other long-legged waders included Yellow-billed Stork, Glossy Ibis, African Spoonbill and a large flock of Grey Crowned-cranes, whilst ducks were represented by Fulvous and White-faced Whistling-ducks, Comb Duck, Hottentot Teal and Southern Pochard. Whilst watching Black Crake, African Jacana and Greater Painted-snipe, Steve had a brief view of a rail and after a few minutes we were all able to enjoy superb views of this African equivalent of our Water Rail. True waders included Black-winged Stilt, Blacksmith, Long-toed and Spur-winged Lapwings and Kittlitz's Plover, whilst a Gull-billed Tern was found in amongst the numerous Whiskered Terns. Malachite Kingfisher showed well, whilst Lesser Swamp-warbler was a little shy at first but eventually showed well to everyone. Continuing north towards Mount Kenya, we reached the Tana River. Almost immediately after disembarking the buses we found several extremely good birds: Moustached Grass-warbler, Little Rush Warbler and Hinde's Pied Babbler. Walking down through the cultivation and into the marshes, we also added Grey-headed Kingfisher, African Pygmy-kingfisher, African and Holub's Golden Weavers, White-winged Widowbird and Bronze and Brown-backed Mannikins. We made several impromptu stops for African Cuckoo-hawk soaring overhead, African Harrier-hawk, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Lilac-breasted Roller and Spot-flanked Barbet before we reached the entrance to Mountain Lodge on the slopes of Mount Kenya. Walking along the lodge entrance road we added quite a few new species, including Tambourine Dove, African Green-pigeon, Red-fronted Parrot, Hartlaub's Turaco, White-headed Woodhoopoe, Crowned Hornbill, Red-fronted and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, Black Sawwing, Black and Grey Cuckoo-shrikes, Grey-olive and Sombre Greenbuls, Black-throated Apalis, Pale and African Dusky Flycatchers, White-bellied Tit, Waller's Starling and Brown-capped Weaver. All the time we had to keep a careful eye out as buffalo and elephant are common here! Driving on to the lodge car park, we checked into our rooms before going to the viewing area over a waterhole in the middle of the forest. Looking out, the most obvious feature was the constant stream of Cape Buffalos coming in to drink, along with smaller numbers of Defasa Waterbuck and Bushbuck, whilst smaller animals were represented by a huge troop of Olive Baboons and Marsh Mongoose. Wary Egyptian Geese looked more in keeping here than in the UK, whilst the Cape Wagtails were the only ones of the trip. All the time we had to keep our eyes on our equipment to stop the Blue Sykes' Monkeys from stealing anything! As darkness fell, we started dinner only to be interrupted several times, first by African Elephants coming in to drink, then a pair of beautiful Common Genet taking scraps of meat from a prepared feeding station and finally, Spotted Hyenas, a wonderful end to the day.

**Day 4:** Everyone was up for first light to watch the waterhole and we were not disappointed with a number of new birds for the trip: Rameron and Delegorgue's Pigeons sat at the tops of the trees; brief views of the forest-dwelling Scaly Francolin; Hunter's Cisticolas everywhere; and Cinnamon Bracken-warbler, Grey-capped Warbler and Rufous Chatterer in the bushes just below the viewing balcony. After breakfast, we took a two-hour walk (accompanied by an armed guard, as there are plenty of dangerous animals about!) Leaving the lodge we immediately found a White-starred Robin skulking in the bushes. A Moustached Tinkerbird was equally elusive but this time by being at the very tops of the trees! Bearded Woodpecker, Slender-billed Greenbul, Eastern Mountain-greenbul and Chestnut-throated and Grey Apalis were all easier but we had to work harder for African Hill-babbler and Grey-headed Negrofinch. Eastern Double-collared Sunbird and Kikuyu White-eyes were very

easy, as was an extremely confiding Thick-billed Seed-eater. Common Waxbill and Yellow-crowned Canary were also seen before we headed back to the lodge to pack and leave. Continuing north, we made a brief stop in some wet cultivation where Long-tailed and Red-collared Widowbirds, Pin-tailed Whydah and African Quailfinch all showed extremely well, as did a number of butterflies, including African Monarch. Crossing the Equator, our journey was next interrupted by a puncture on one of the vans. Amazingly (given the state of the roads in the parks), this was the only puncture of the tour and it happened on an excellent tarmac road! Fortunately, it didn't happen when we were watching a group of lions! The bumpy and dusty stretch of road between Isiolo and the Buffalo Springs National Reserve entrance seemed well worth the slight discomfort when we arrived in the park. Almost immediately, a superb Scissor-tailed Kite was spotted not only an excellent bird for Kenya, but also a country tick for Steve! Other raptors added to the excitement with Brown Snake-eagle, Bataleur and African Hawk-eagle all seen well, but Pygmy Falcon vied with the kite for the most attention! Game birds were widespread in the park due to the lack of hunting, with Yellow-necked Francolin, Helmeted Guineafowl, Buff-crested and Kori Bustards, and Black-faced and Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse all giving wonderful photographic opportunities. There was rarely a quiet moment as D'arnaud's Barbet, White-headed Mousebird, Little Bee-eater, African Hoopoe, Green Woodhoopoe, Pink-breasted Lark, Dodson's Bulbul, Stout Cisticola, Northern Crombec, Northern Anteater-chat, Black-bellied Sunbird, Northern Puffback, Rosy-patched Bushshrike, Greater Blue-eared Glossy-starling, Red-billed Oxpecker, White-headed Buffalo-weaver, Black-capped and Donaldson-smith's Sparrow-weavers, Golden Palm-weaver and Chestnut Weaver were added as new birds, whilst Grevy's Zebra and Gerenuk were new mammals. Finally, we reached the excellent Samburu Serena Lodge, our base for the next two nights. But the birding in the grounds was not over yet, Red-billed Hornbills and White-bellied Go-away-birds were extremely confiding and Palm-nut Vulture flew along the river.

**Day 5:** The whole day was spent around Buffalo Springs National Reserve with a visit across the river to Samburu N.P. Today we caught up with a number of northern specialities and enjoyed an excellent day for raptors including four species of vulture (Hooded, Lapped-faced, Rüppell's and White-backed), the magnificent Martial Eagle and Black-breasted Snake-eagle. Shortly after leaving the lodge we saw Spur-winged Lapwing, before adding two more species of game bird, Crested Francolin and Vulturine Guineafowl. A magnificent Verreaux's Eagle-owl was found at its daytime roost, and in a day of extremes, we also found the smallest owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet. During the course of the day we drove slowly around the maze of tracks seeing many new birds including a flock of fly-over Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Red-bellied Parrot, Klaas's Cuckoo, Somali Bee-eater, Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Red-winged Lark, African Bare-eyed Thrush, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Somali Crombec, Pygmy Batis, Somali Tit, Hunter's Sunbird, Fan-tailed Raven, Fischer's and Golden-breasted Starlings, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Blue-capped Cordon-bleu, African Silverbill, Cut-throat and Somali Golden-breasted Bunting. Mammals were very much in evidence today with our first Lion (female on a kill), Cheetah, Impala, Kirks' Dikdik, Beisa Oryx, Reticulated Giraffe and an amazingly colourful Rock Agama lizard. During the heat of the day we returned to the lodge where we were entertained by the extremely confiding Red-billed Hornbills and White-bellied Go-away-birds, whilst skulking in the undergrowth, bathing from the sprinklers, were Northern Brownbul and White-winged Scrub-robin. In the evening, we settled down at a vantage point overlooking the river where Leopards sometimes appear on the opposite bank. Sadly, we were not lucky tonight, but a couple of Water Thick-knees kept us entertained as darkness gradually fell. Suddenly, nightjars started to fly over the river and we were able to identify both Donaldson-smith's and Slender-taileds as they repeatedly swooped alternately over the river and overhead. The grand finale was still to come however, the lodge staff threw some scrap meat over the wall and an enormous Nile Crocodile lumbered out of the water, it must have been 4-5 metres long!

**Day 6:** After an early breakfast, we set off back through Buffalo Springs National Reserve birding en route. Wonderful views of both African Fish-eagle and Bataleur were somewhat overshadowed by our first Secretarybird. Next, a White-bellied Bustard crouched furtively close to our vehicles thinking that we could not see him, before creeping away. Wondering why the first bus then screeched to a sudden halt, those in the second vehicle were told over the CB that someone had spotted two Somali Ostriches and had shouted out so loud that

Peter the driver had nearly had a heart attack! Fortunately, the birds were far enough away not to be disturbed by the furore! In the mosaic of habitats in Buffalo Springs National Reserve, we explored an area of semi-desert grassland where Desert Cisticola was easily located, before stopping off at a disused lodge with a small patch of woodland. Obviously Steve knew that it would be good here and he was right, soon we were watching a trio of very difficult species: Brown-tailed Apalis, Mouse-coloured Penduline-tit and Yellow-bellied Waxbill. As we left the lodge a pair of Fan-tailed Ravens put on a good show of their bat-like shape and an Ethiopian Swallow flew over. Finally, on the final approach to the park entrance, a Somali Courser gave wonderful views. Although we were sad to say goodbye to this excellent reserve, we knew that there were many good birds ahead. Back on to the bumpy, dusty road heading south, but this time we made several stops to see both Chestnut-headed and Fischer's Sparrow-larks. Back through Isiolo and a quick diversion gave us incredible views of a Boran Cisticola, an extremely localised bird. Continuing back south towards Mount Kenya, we stopped on the Equator for the obligatory photographs and a lecture on how water flowed down a plug hole in different directions by an enterprising local. With heavy rain in the area and the top of Mount Kenya shrouded in cloud, we were concerned about our ascent tomorrow. Eventually, we arrived at Naro Moro Lodge in time for some late afternoon birding in the grounds alongside the river, where Yellow-whiskered Greenbul was quite obliging but less so the Placid Greenbul. Northern Double-collared Sunbirds fed on the flowers and a male Red-headed Weaver was building a nest in the car park.

**Day 7:** An early morning walk gave us brief flight views of African Black Duck, Giant Kingfisher and better views of Yellow-bellied Waxbill, as well as an amazingly confiding African Dusky Flycatcher in the car park. After heavy overnight rain, we weren't too optimistic about our chances of getting up Mount Kenya. Arriving at the park entrance, the sides of the road were wet and muddy so we left our drivers to see if we could get to the Met station whilst we did some birding, with Rameron Pigeon and Golden-winged Sunbird showing well. We were to be allowed up the mountain, but at our own risk! We decided to bird the first part of the access road and this was an extremely good plan as within 15 minutes we had seen several very good birds, Mountain Yellow Warbler, Brown Woodland Warbler and a pair of the rare Abbot's Starling. Our ascent of the mountain was going rather well until we met an extremely muddy and steep section. No problem, our highly skilled drivers managed to negotiate it and in no time we were at the meteorological station. Feeling the altitude, we moved slowly but purposefully towards the buildings where, within minutes, we were watching Moorland Chats. Almost immediately, a pair of Jackson's Francolins was spotted and then, amazingly, our third target bird, Abyssinian Ground-thrush, was also found. We had seen all three of our target birds, including the endemic Jackson's Francolin extremely well and were on our way down within thirty minutes in glorious sunshine! Moving down the mountain someone spotted a huge raptor soaring overhead, we all piled out and there above us was a magnificent Crowned Hawk-eagle. With a long drive ahead, we set out on the first leg, stopping after a couple of hours at a disused quarry where a local man met us and took us to see a huge Mackinder's Eagle-owl roosting on the cliff face. With gathering clouds, swifts started coming lower and we were able to compare African Black and Nyanza Swifts. Shortly after re-boarding the buses, it started to rain hard. The rain became torrential and then suddenly it hailed and, within a couple of minutes, the road was white. Both drivers stopped in amazement, they had never seen anything like it, especially as we were on the Equator again! As they got out of the vehicles, Sampson nearly fell over, he hadn't anticipated it being quite so slippery, we proceeded at a sedate pace until the roads cleared! Our next stop was at the Thompson's Falls, a somewhat touristy area because of the beautiful scenery. Whilst admiring the falls our target bird, Slender-billed Starling, was spotted flying over the far side of the gorge. Not good views but fortunately it perched in a tree together with about 30 others and we were able to get good telescope views. With time passing, we carried on towards Lake Nakuru, entering the park just as it started to rain again. Fortunately, it was only light rain and didn't stop us enjoying Rüppell's Glossy-starlings and a Diederik Cuckoo. Driving through the acacia woodland we eventually found a lake overlook and what a view, flamingos as far as the eye could see. There were supposed to be 1.2 million Lesser Flamingos and although we didn't count them, it certainly looked like it. New birds flowed thick and fast, in amongst the Lesser Flamingos on the lake were smaller numbers of Greater Flamingo, Great White Pelican, Goliath Heron, Cape Teal, Yellow-billed Duck, Grey-headed Gull and White-winged Tern, whilst Horus Swifts flew low overhead and a Grey-

backed Fiscal sat within feet of us. Moving away from the lake towards the Sarova Lion Hill Lodge, our base for the night, we added Broad-billed Roller before our drivers heard over the CB that the cat that everyone wanted to see had been spotted, a Leopard. Fortunately, it was close by and we were treated to excellent close views of an adult sat in a low tree, a wonderful end to the day.

**Day 8:** We spent the morning around Lake Nakuru, starting well with amazing views of an Augur Buzzard, Blue-spotted Wood-dove, two species of cuckoo: Black and Levillant's, Common Scimitarbill, Scaly-throated Honeyguide and Crimson-rumped Waxbill. A troop of Olive Baboons showed well and one bus had brief views of a Hildebrandt's Francolin. Northern Anteater-chats were quite common, whilst a family of Black-backed Jackals and Common Zebra were oblivious to our presence. A Black Rhino took more interest in us however, although he probably didn't know what we were, he certainly knew we were there and wasn't happy! We encountered several of the Masai sub-species of ostrich, which looked subtly different to the Somali. Red-capped and Rufous-naped Larks, Plain-backed Pipit and Pectoral-patch Cisticola were all new for the trip, but a second Leopard obligingly sitting in a tree stole the show! An Augur Buzzard posed right above us in a tree for photographs before we moved to the lakeshore again to take another look at the spectacle of 1.2 million Lesser Flamingos. There was a myriad of other waterbirds, of which Black-necked Grebe, Red-billed Duck and Three-banded Plover were new. The bird that we were particularly looking for, however, was eventually found – a Dimorphic Egret well out of its range (normally coastal). As we entered the grassland surrounding the lake, a Cliff Chat hopped around in front of us before a mother and calf White Rhino added another wanted mammal to our lists, and Rothschild's Giraffe was a new sub-species. A muddy puddle was crowded with butterflies, whilst back in the woodland, a Long-crested Eagle posed for photographs and a small group of Arrow-marked Babblers was found. Sadly, we had to leave Lake Nakura to drive to Lake Baringo but a number of stops were made en route. Our first stop was for a group of swallows perched on telephone wires, with both the huge Mosque Swallow and Angola Swallow present. No sooner had the first bus driven off than a Silverbird was found, quickly followed by a group of White-fronted Bee-eaters. Nearing Baringo it was obvious that recent rains had had a dramatic effect on the infrastructure, with several bridges totally washed away. During a couple of these impromptu deviations off-road, we saw the scarce Black-headed Lapwing and enjoyed excellent views of an African Pygmy-kingfisher. As we turned off the main road to drive down to our new lodge, several Madagascar Bee-eaters were spotted on telephone wires. Checking into our rooms as quickly as possible to make the last of the evening light, a Red-chested Cuckoo was tracked down by its call, and Brown Babbler, African Thrush, Red-faced Crombec, Wattled Starling and White-billed Buffalo-weaver were all seen in the trees outside. Meanwhile, on the adjacent lake, Pink-backed Pelican and Common Moorhen were seen in the fading light, but the cacophony of weavers remained unseen. We had to be escorted to and from our rooms at night here because Hippopotamus liked grazing on our lawn!

**Day 9:** An early morning visit to the escarpment cliffs close to the lake was very rewarding with several new species seen in truly impressive scenery. The very local Bristle-crowned Starling, Lanner Falcon, Common Kestrel (an isolated population which may be split into Rock Kestrel), Brown-tailed Chat and Lesser Masked and Little Weavers were all seen well before we picked up our local guide. Immediately, he took us to a nearby spot where two Northern White-faced Scops-owls were roosting, whilst nearby we found Beautiful Sunbird and Green-winged Pytilia. On the way back to breakfast, we also added Woodland Kingfisher, White-throated Bee-eater and Eastern Paradise-whydah. Breakfast was spent in a constant state of conflict between binoculars, cameras and food as a succession of birds visited the feeders: African Mourning-dove, Red-and-yellow Barbet, Jackson's Hornbill, Jackson's Golden-backed and Village Weavers and White-browed Buffalo-weaver all vied for attention. After breakfast and a look at a huge centipede, we picked up our guide again and he took us to a site where two magnificent Greyish Eagle-owls were roosting, giving amazing views. Nearby, Slender-tailed Nightjar and Heuglin's Courser showed equally well at their daytime roost sites, Dark Chanting-goshawk watched us as we looked for the courser and on our way back to the hotel for lunch, a Hemprich's Hornbill flew over us towards the cliffs. A leisurely lunch was taken in the heat of the day followed by a stroll around the grounds, where many birds proved very confiding. Shikra and Fork-tailed Drongo were unconcerned by our

presence and we eventually tracked down a Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike, but several Yellow-winged Bats were uncharacteristically shy, flying in daylight whenever they knew they were being watched! Down at the lakeshore, Northern Masked-weavers, Northern Red and Yellow-crowned Bishops were all busy displaying, but Allen's Gallinule took a little more patience to see as they skulked in the reeds. Late in the afternoon we took a boat trip on the lake, although the waters were somewhat muddy following the recent rains and we saw little new, it was an enjoyable experience watching Squacco Herons, Purple and Striated Herons, Black-crowned Night-heron, Little Bittern and Malachite and Pied Kingfishers. We were also treated to the amazing spectacle of an African Fish-eagle chasing a Purple Heron for several minutes, the heron eventually escaped! The highlight was, however, views of a couple of Hippopotamus skulking in the vegetation.

**Day 10:** Today we travelled west towards Kakamega Forest. It was a slow journey however, punctuated by many birding stops. Our first stop was at a traditional spot for Ross's Turaco and we were not disappointed with prolonged views. Our next stop was at a rather unsightly rubbish tip (well what birding trip doesn't visit at least one?) where we saw our only Bronze-tailed Glossy-starling of the trip, as well as Banded Martin and Northern Grey-headed Sparrow. Continuing on, we stopped at an area of upland marshy grassland, which appeared no different to many other similar sites. But Steve knew better and soon we were watching a feast of widowbirds, with Fan-tailed, the rare and local Jackson's and Red-collared Widowbird all showing well. Additionally, we found an obliging Grey Crowned-crane, Cardinal Quelea, Black-winged Red Bishop, Wing-snapping Cisticola and the very illusive and local Zebra Waxbill, an excellent stop! Several more impromptu rapid halts gave us Wahlberg's Eagle, White-crested Turaco, White-headed Barbet, Northern Black-flycatcher and Golden-breasted Bunting before we stopped for our packed lunches close to a village. Of course, this attracted the attention of all the local children but they were very good and were rewarded with the surplus food. The birding was good here as well, with Black-headed Gonolek, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver, Red-headed Bluebill and Black-crowned Waxbill all being new. Eventually, we reached the wonderful Kakamega Forest and were immediately watching new birds by the roadside. Double-toothed Barbet, White-headed Saw-wing, Brown-chested Alethe, Equatorial Akalat, Buff-bellied Warbler and Green-backed Eremomela were all seen before we arrived at the wonderful Rondo Retreat Centre, right in the heart of forest, for a three-night stay. After checking into our rooms it wasn't long before we were utilising the last bit of daylight looking at Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill, Joyful Bulbul, Grey Tit-flycatcher, Snowy-crowned Robin-chat and Marico Sunbird, a wonderful end to the day.

**Day 11:** Normally, when you are nearly two-thirds of the way through a tour, new birds become more difficult to find, especially in rainforest. Incredibly, we recorded an amazing 46 new species today, showing that Kakamega is indeed a superb area of remnant rainforest, and that Steve and our local guide, Wilberforce, make an excellent team. Our first destination after breakfast was the pumphouse trail and the birds started immediately, with superb specialities such as Chapin's Flycatcher, African Shrike-flycatcher, Petit's Cuckoo-shrike, Dusky Tit, Red-headed Malimbe and White-breasted Negrofinch. Here we experienced a feast of greenbuls with no less than nine species seen during the day, including six new ones: Shelley's, Grey, Anson's, Honeyguide, Cabanis's and Toro Olive-greenbul, as well as many other species only found in more remote areas of central Africa: Great Blue Turaco, Mackinnon's Fiscal, Pink-footed Puffback, Bocage's and Lühder's Bushshrikes, Southern Hyliota, African Yellow White-eye, White-chinned Prinia, Black-collared and Buff-throated Apalis, Olive-green Camaroptera, Turner's Eremomela and Uganda Woodland-warbler. We also visited an area of natural grassland set in the forest where Chubb's Cisticola showed well. After returning to Rondo for lunch, where Brown-throated Wattle-eye, African Blue-flycatcher and three new species of sunbird (Green-throated, Grey-chinned and Western Olive) were seen, we headed back into the forest again in the afternoon, working different areas. Grey-throated and Yellow-billed Barbets, Brown-eared and Buff-spotted Woodpeckers, Chestnut and Jameson's Wattle-eyes, Dusky Crested-flycatcher, Blue-shouldered Robin-chat, Brown Illadopsis, Square-tailed Drongo, Stuhlmann's Starling, Vieillot's Black-weaver and Dark-backed Weaver. It would be easy to get lost in this forest without a guide, but as we criss-crossed the paths tracking down calling birds, this never crossed our minds! A couple of new monkeys were also seen: Black-and-white Colobus and Red-tailed Monkey. With the afternoon

drawing on we started to make our way out of the forest when suddenly Steve heard a Red-chested Owlet calling in the distance. Eventually, we managed to track it down and all had excellent (if somewhat neck-breaking) views of this highly elusive bird.

**Day 12:** Another eagerly awaited day in the forest after yesterday's success and today we caught up with a number of species that we had only heard the previous day. First, we descended to the stream in the grounds of Rondo to try for White-spotted Flufftail, which was seen several times briefly. Returning to the forest, we walked slowly around various trails following up calls heard by Steve's expert ears. The most amazing bird of the day was African Grey Parrot, an extremely rare bird in Kenya now with perhaps less than ten birds. Other species seen included Golden-crowned Woodpecker, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Yellowbill, Least Honeyguide, Common Bristlebill, Black-faced Prinia, Black-faced Rufous Warbler, Green Hylia, Western Black-headed Oriole and Black-billed Weaver. The undoubted highlights, however, were prolonged views of a pair of Blue-headed Bee-eaters and Hairy-breasted Barbet nest building. The latter is a seldom-seen bird let alone seen at the nest! After lunch, we were extremely fortunate to witness the amazing display of a male African Broadbill before looking for wattle-eyes in the forest again. This afternoon, not only did we find Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye, but also saw Brown-throated, Chestnut and Jameson's, making it a four wattle-eye day! Two other species were also seen before we returned to Rondo: Mottled Spinetail and Yellow-shouldered Widowbird, meaning that we had recorded another 18 species of bird in the forest today, as well as Rough-scaled Bush-viper and Blue-headed Tree Agama.

**Day 13:** Sadly, we had to leave Rondo, but with Lake Victoria and the Masai Mara ahead of us there was still plenty to see. We travelled to Lake Victoria without stopping and headed straight to the papyrus beds along the lakeshore. There were a few mosquitoes around but nothing as bad as we had feared, and within 30 minutes we had seen several excellent new species including Blue-headed Coucal, Papyrus Gonolek, Swamp Flycatcher and Carruthers's Cisticola. Moving on to a café by the lakeshore, African Openbill, Long-tailed Cormorant, Common Sandpiper and Pied Kingfisher sat in a little group on a small rock in the lake, whilst Black-billed Barbet was found in the adjacent bushes. A nearby area of wasteland gave us Sharpe's Pied-babbler and Copper and Red-chested Sunbirds before we returned to the café to check the papyrus beds for weavers. Before too long we were enjoying views of Northern Brown-throated, Slender-billed and Yellow-backed Weavers as well as Yellow-throated Greenbul. Finally, a Western Grey Plantain-eater was heard in a nearby garden, but despite an extensive search we couldn't find it and had to content ourselves with Yellow-fronted Canary. With time moving on, we set off for the Masai Mara stopping several times en route for species like Southern Red Bishop and Purple Grenadier. Eventually, we reached the entrance to the park but instead of entering it, we diverted up a nearby hillside to look for Schalow's Turaco. Not only were we successful with this but we also found Fine-banded Woodpecker, Familiar Chat and Tabora Cisticola. Entering the park, we soon encountered our first new birds: Red-necked Francolin, Usambiro Barbet and Sooty Chat, before seeing the first of many Masai Giraffes. The views over the grasslands extended for miles, right into the Serengeti in Tanzania, and the habitat was obviously perfect for raptors, as White-headed Vulture, Banded Snake-eagle and Grey Kestrel were all new. Coqui Francolin were surprisingly easy to see (compared with southern Africa) but it was the mammals that nearly stole the show, with great views of Spotted Hyena, Cape Buffalo, Warthog, Wildebeest, Topi, Thompson's Gazelle and Elan (complete with Yellow-billed Oxpeckers!) Two new cisticolas were added to our impressive list: Red-faced and Trilling, and from the tiny to the large, Masai Ostrich, Black-bellied Bustard and Wattled Lapwing were all seen on the track. The park rules are that all vehicles must be back at the lodges by dusk and we still had some way to go so we set off with purpose, only to find the vans on different tracks! Unfortunately, the second van found a Bat Hawk, which the first van was unable to locate from a distance, but the scores were equalled when the first van found a Marsh Owl for everyone to see. Now it was a race against time to get to the Mara Serena Lodge before the gates were locked, but we did so by the skin of our teeth and neither driver had to pay a fine!

**Day 14:** This morning we went for a pre-breakfast drive to check the recently burnt areas and we succeeded in finding our target bird, Temminck's Courser. After breakfast, we headed out of the park through the Oololo gate again, promising that we would stop for souvenirs from the Masai women when we returned. En route, we encountered a number of the species seen yesterday, including Secretarybird and Cape Buffalo. Having missed Rufous-necked Wryneck at several locations already, we tried again and this time with immediate success when a pair responded immediately to a tape and literally sat in a bush a few feet away. Next, we visited Kichwa Tembo Camp, where we had originally intended to stay for two nights. We were allowed access to the grounds but unfortunately, it was rather quiet and the only new species seen was African Goshawk, although Ross's Turaco and a small group of Warthog piglets used some film! After a couple of hours we headed into another part of the park over what can best be called a very rough kilometre of track! A Swahili Sparrow created a diversion before we settled down to lunch under a tree, frightening several vultures out of it! After lunch, we visited the Mara River, seeing a Meyer's Parrot and good numbers of Hippopotamus. A nearby marsh was very interesting with good numbers of birds including Long-toed Lapwing, Three-banded Plover and Sacred and Glossy Ibis, but best of all were a superb Rufous-bellied Heron and Rosy-throated Longclaw. Other species seen in the area included Egyptian Vulture, Rufous-chested Swallow, Plain-backed Pipit and Zitting Cisticola. Returning back down the rough track we stopped by a steep rocky hillside, which Steve thought looked good for Rock-loving Cisticola. He was not wrong and despite having to scramble up the slope we were all treated to excellent views of this excellent bird. In addition, Green-capped Eremomela was new to our list. By now it was cloudy and windy and we could see smoke in the park so we decided to head back to the Oololo gate, but unfortunately the Masai women missed a lot of sales as they had gone home early! Back in the park we saw many mammals again, including African Elephant, and several birds were seen well despite the wind, including Hamerkop, Black-bellied Bustard, Wattled Lapwing, Grey-backed Fiscal and Black-shouldered Kite. With dusk approaching early because of the smoke, we decided to head back to the lodge, and in exactly the same place as yesterday we saw the Marsh Owl.

**Day 15:** Part of the Mara management is to burn old grass prior to the herds of herbivores arriving, and fires were in progress when we arrived yesterday. Unfortunately, the heavy showers had missed the burning areas and the result was a smoky haze this morning. Fortunately, this didn't affect birding as much as mammal viewing. We took a pre-breakfast drive again and had more excellent views of Black-bellied Bustard before we found our target species, Black-winged Lapwing. As we scoured previously burnt areas with green shoots starting to come through, several Yellow-throated Sandgrouse were found, and some of the group had brief views of a Caspian Plover flying over. Vultures were very prevalent in the park this morning and most of them were perched on bushes waiting for the thermals. We enjoyed extremely close views of Lappet-faced, White-backed and Rüppell's Vultures. A Red-capped Lark hopped around the vans but then, excitement, a group of Cheetahs were found and we were right in the middle of a mother and her two cubs. Amazingly, as these magnificent animals walked around us, we found a recently born Thompson's Gazelle huddled in the grass (it was lucky that we didn't run over it), which the Cheetahs hadn't discovered because newly born fawns don't have any smell. A Spotted Hyena prowled around but kept a respectful distance. As we returned to the lodge, we found a gorgeous male Grey-headed Bushshrike right in the car park. After breakfast, saying goodbye to the Rock Hyrax (which kept trying to get into our rooms) and packing, we set off towards the east side of the park, seeing their closely related larger cousins, African Elephant, en route. Once again, we were incredibly lucky and saw another group of Cheetahs make a kill and were then able to observe them at close quarters. A Lilac-breasted Roller posed for photographs before we drove just into Tanzania where security forces checked us. Lots more Hippopotamus were on the Mara River and we had to be careful, not because of the army or the Hippos, but because of the thieving Green Vervet Monkeys!! Moving on, we stopped under another tree for lunch (once again disturbing Rüppell's and White-backed Vultures), whilst Wildebeest kept a wary eye on us. It is a long way through this huge park but with numerous stops the day passed quite quickly. Striped Kingfisher was found on a roadside signpost and an immense Saddle-billed Stork was spotted flying over before we checked into the Mara Sarova Lodge. After looking at a few birds such as Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Black-headed Oriole in the grounds, we set off out again for the last hour of daylight. Unfortunately, an impassable marshy area blocked our intended

track but nevertheless, we found two new species, Bare-faced Go-away-bird and Flappet Lark, before we had to head back. As we entered the lodge gates, a nightjar species flew off the road. After dinner, we met by the conference room and played an African Scops-owl tape. Within minutes we were enjoying amazing views of this tiny owl. After the log, some of us decided to see if we could refind the nightjar but the security guard would not allow us out of the gate for safety reasons! Not to be thwarted in our attempts we shone the lights through the gate and hey presto, the bird was sitting on the road. After a number of views of the bird sitting and flying around, we were able to identify it as Abyssinian or Montane Nightjar.

**Day 16:** After breakfast we exited the park through the Sekenani gate to spend a couple of profitable hours in an area of acacia woodland. Although it was very windy, the area was filled with birds, starting with Secretarybird. Our target species was Magpie Shrike but the wind was going to make it difficult. A Croaking Cisticola showed well before we located our bird, which showed extremely well. There was a large flock of birds moving through the trees and scrub and with perseverance we managed to find Pale Wren-warbler (Miombo Camaroptera) and Buff-bellied Penduline-tit (Buff-bellied Penduline-tit) alongside many other good birds, including Red-throated Tit. Continuing on our way, several more stops were made alongside the track for Two-banded Courser, Southern Grosbeak-canary and an amazing Chameleon before we hit tarmac roads and 'civilisation' again. As we sped away from the Masai Mara, numerous safari vans were heading towards it following the relaxation of travel restrictions. In one place there had obviously been a grain spill on the road as there were hundreds of pigeons and doves, including Speckled Pigeon, African Mourning-dove, Ring-necked Dove, Red-eyed Dove and Dusky Turtle-dove, which made for excellent comparisons. As we entered the huge crater of Logonot National Park, we started to search for our next target species, Greater Kestrel, but without success. We did find, however, Grey-rumped Swallow, several Schalow's Wheatears and Capped Wheatear. At the last gasp, however, just as we were leaving the crater, a Greater Kestrel was spotted. Nearing Lake Naivasha, we made a last stop on a hillside for Lyne's Cisticola but unfortunately, without success. A Black Goshawk was seen by a few briefly soaring over the road before we arrived at the Lake Naivasha Country Club with an hour of daylight left to bird the grounds. It was a magnificent sunset over the lake as we watched Red-knobbed Coot, Grey Headed Gull, Brimstone Canary and many other birds.

**Day 17:** Up early for our last full day in Kenya and our boat trip on Lake Naivasha. Red-knobbed Coots abounded by the landing stage as well as Maribou Stork and Spur-winged Lapwing. It was a perfect morning on the lake and we enjoyed wonderful close-up views of Great White Pelican, Comb Duck, Grey Crowned-crane (in flight) and Whiskered Tern, as well as Pied Avocet and Black-tailed Godwit to make us feel more at home! There were wonderful encounters with Hippopotamus as well as Defassa Waterbuck and Thompson's Gazelle. Back to dry land and Pied Kingfisher and Nubian Woodpecker did their best to prevent us from walking along the landing stage! A Barn Owl was found at its daytime roost, whilst Sacred Ibis strutted around the lawn. All too soon it was time to drive back to Nairobi but, of course, with stops en route. Immediately after leaving the lodge we stopped for White-fronted Bee-eater and a Saddle-billed Stork before a successful visit to a gorge for the bird we missed yesterday, Lyne's Cisticola. It was then a long steep climb up the hill out of the rift valley but eventually we got into the highlands where the weather was much windier and colder. The bird we were looking for is not only an endemic but also one of the rarest in the country with its habitat rapidly disappearing. We weren't expecting too much and were happy to see Black-winged Lapwings, Common Quail and several African Snipe, but then, amazingly, there it was – a Sharpe's Longclaw – giving amazing and prolonged views and even allowing video and photographs. We left the area in high spirits to visit a nearby area of highland forest. The forest access road was very muddy with fallen branches also impeding our progress. Eventually, we had to walk and it was interesting to find out the reason for the road destruction, elephant prints! We found a number of excellent birds in the forest, including White-tailed Crested-flycatcher, Black-fronted Bushshrike, Eastern Olive-sunbird and Abyssinian Crimsonwing, so it would be churlish to be disappointed at the absence of our target bird, Bar-tailed Trogon. Returning to the road back to Nairobi, we made one final stop at a roadside lake with a number of ducks on it, including White-backed Duck and Maccoa Duck, which were both new for the tour. All too soon we were back in the hustle-bustle of Nairobi and checking into our hotel for the last night.

**Day 18:** Our last morning was spent in Nairobi National Park, where a remarkable number of new species were added given that it was the last day of the tour. At the first pond a single African Darter was seen, but it was in the nearby scrub and woodland that the action started. First we watched a superb African Moustached Warbler hopping around on the track, then a Siffling Cisticola was found. Whilst watching this, an African Yellow Warbler popped into view, followed by excellent views of a Slender-tailed Mongoose. Next, a pipit was flushed from the track and promptly flew into the trees for everyone to see well, it was the soon-to-be-split Nairobi Pipit, presently a sub-species of Long-billed Pipit. As we drove away, a huge raptor flew over our heads carrying something, it was a Martial Eagle carrying our Slender-tailed Mongoose! Conveniently it perched in a nearby tree where we were rewarded with outstanding views. Carrying on to another lake, African Swamphen and Black-crowned Night-heron were seen, and at a nearby watering hole, Rosy-breasted Longclaw eventually showed well. Scanning the grasslands backed by the skyscrapers of Nairobi, we saw several Masai Ostriches before finally finding our target species, Hartlaub's Bustard, which gave excellent prolonged views allowing us to identify it as an immature male. We searched in vain for White-tailed Lark but were rewarded for our efforts with wonderful views of a Pangani Longclaw. Our final stop was a lunch break with a magnificent spread provided by our friends at the Maxwell Adventist Academy. Whilst eating, we were constantly on our guard for the Green Vervet Monkeys (some crazy tourists were feeding them despite the warnings) and on one occasion we had to chase one out of the van! Overhead we had close views of Mottled Swifts before we had to pack up and leave the park, arriving at Nairobi Airport exactly on time for check-in for the return flight home with not a minute wasted! Our group total was a staggering 610 species plus 4 sub-species which are potential splits. The total includes just 5 'heard onlys' and several members of the group managed to see 600 or more species. We also saw 55 species of mammal including all of the 'big 5'. The success of this tour was due to a combination of excellent group participation and the highly professional guiding of Steve Easley who just seemed to be able to coax that extra 'impossible' species of cisticola out of the bushes with ease!

**Day 19:** Arrival back in the UK at the end of the tour.