

Ethiopia

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Participants

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Prince Ruspoli's Turaco

Day 1 Overnight flight from London to Addis Ababa.

Day 2 After meeting with Solomon and Sveta things got moving very quickly straight into a day's birding so telescopes, binoculars and field guides were quickly made ready to go and birds started straight away with Grey-backed Fiscal, Baglafaecht Weavers, Nyanza Swifts, Pied Crows and the star Superb Starlings in the airport grounds. The bags were quickly loaded into our awaiting four 4x4 vehicles that we were quickly going to become accustomed to, and the four drivers who very quickly became the hard working cog of the trip. Very soon we were into the busy Addis traffic and the mayhem that is Africa; lots of Black (Yellow-billed) Kites and Hooded Vultures were ever present around the towns. Solomon was soon explaining that we were travelling about 100km north with several birding stops en route. One of the first stops was a roadside area full of lots of egrets, Sacred Ibises and circling around were endless numbers of vultures mainly Hooded, White-backed, White-headed and Egyptian Vultures, Rüppell's Griffon and one lovely adult Lammergeier at eye level: wow what a start. Lots of birds everywhere but Solomon wanted to carry on, more important birds ahead!!!! We were soon at Sululta plains an area which is well known for the endemic Erlanger's Lark. A walk onto the grassland area provided us with two Erlanger's Larks, lots of Wattled Ibises our second endemic, Blue-winged Goose with chicks making three endemics WOW!!!, Augur Buzzard, White-collared Pigeon, Red-billed Oxpecker, Moorland Chat, Thekla Lark, Red-breasted and Isabelline Wheatears, and a point-blank Lanner Falcon, the birds just kept coming, but Solomon was soon moving on, more birds to get! A comment that set the trend for the whole trip, keeping to schedule with the pure number of birds to see

would make that task very difficult. After lunch at a quaint little roadside restaurant things got even better, we stopped at the German Eco Lodge at Debre Libanos Gorge. The views into the gorge and the Blue Nile drainage system were just breath-taking and the birds weren't bad either. Raptors, vultures, Fan-tailed Ravens flying past at eye level!! There were Tacazze and Variable Sunbirds, White-rumped Babblers, Erckel's Francolin, White-billed Starlings, Blue Rock-thrush, Ethiopian Boubou to name but a few. A walk around to the Portuguese Bridge provided excellent views of Gelada Baboons chasing each other around. All too quickly we had to leave as it was time to get back to Addis before dark!! Bah humbug!!

Day 3 A quick 30 minutes looking around the hotel grounds before a 06.30 departure. An early start was required to start a long journey down into the Rift Valley, avoiding the traffic of Addis was priority. First stop was a small river bridge on the main road where several African Black Ducks were seen flying over. Breakfast was at an aptly named restaurant called Dreamland where a walk through the restaurant explained the name! The view into the Debre Ziet Crater Lake was amazing and the birds came thick and fast whilst we waited for our food. Little and Blue-breasted Bee-eaters, Wire-tailed Swallow, Squacco Heron, Gull-billed Tern, martins, weavers and barbets. A hearty breakfast was frequently interrupted by another new bird! Soon after breakfast we were at the first of the lakeside sites in and around Debre Zeit. White-backed Duck, White-faced Whistling-duck, Northern Shoveler, Southern Pochard, Red-billed Duck, Spur-winged Goose, lots of Common Cranes, Marabou Stork were all present. African Fish-eagles were everywhere alongside Hamerkop, African Snipe, Glossy Ibis, Spur-winged Lapwing, Greater Spotted Eagle, Black Crowned-crane, Great White and Intermediate Egrets, African Spoonbill, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilts and other waders. Great White and Pink-backed Pelicans were also seen as we tried several more sites and the birds kept coming. We followed a track along the side of a lake that led to an extensive wetland area so we stopped at the end of the track to scan the area. The first bird was a stunning Rufous-necked Wryneck, lots of Ruffs, Wood, Common and one Marsh Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover and at least 40 Kittlitz's Plovers. African Pygmy-geese were seen and Yellow Wagtails were everywhere. Our first Northern Carmine Bee-eater sat on a wire overhead. Also seen were African Marsh-harrier, African Dart, Long-tailed and Great Cormorants, African Jacana, Purple Heron, Namaqua Dove and Pied Kingfisher whilst several Black Herons were looking for food and doing the umbrella dance. Travelling on we made many roadside stops with a sighting of a Long-crested Eagle and Dark Chanting-goshawk being the pick of the bunch as they sat obligingly on posts. A trend that was to quickly become apparent was the long journeys on poor roads that needed to be made to get us between the amazing birding sites we were to visit. The hardworking drivers dealt with it all skilfully just leaving us to marvel at the beautiful landscapes. Arriving at the Hotel in Awassa just as dusk crept in.

Day 4 Being woken by the cries of African Fish-eagles was an excellent start to the day, and as the sky lightened Silvery-cheeked Hornbills started to appear everywhere. A 06.30 pre-breakfast walk started the day within the grounds of the hotel, a mind-numbing number of birds started to show. One Spotted Creeper, then two, and then more!! African Grey Flycatcher, Nubian Woodpecker, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Spectacled Weaver, Black-headed Batis, White-browed Robin-chat, Blue-headed Coucal, a beautiful Woodland Kingfisher, Black-winged Lovebirds and the first of the mischievous Grivet Monkeys appeared. It was hard to leave for breakfast!! A buffet breakfast hit the spot and ready to go we walked down to Awassa fish market, with a Eurasian Hobby circling around above us. The market was hugely busy with too many people. The strangest sight was seeing huge Marabou Stork just walking around with the people. Many Whiskered, White-winged and Gull-billed Terns as well as Grey-headed Gulls were busy chasing food scraps. A walk around the park was then the order of the day and although it was busy it still produced some lovely birds. Highlights being Northern Black-flycatcher, Spotted Creeper, Little and Blue-breasted Bee-eaters, Banded Barbet, Violet-backed Starling, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Mosque Swallow, Eurasian Wryneck and Thick-billed Raven. Lunch was taken at a local hotel in a lovely outdoor setting watching birds as we had lunch. Swainson's Sparrow, Nubian Woodpecker, Spotted Flycatcher, Red-cheeked Cordonbleu were all seen from the lunch table. After lunch we took a walk around the grounds and along the lakeside. We had excellent views of Rufous-necked and Eurasian Wrynecks, Red-billed Firefinch, African Citril. Grey-headed, Malachite and Pied Kingfishers and African Pygmy-kingfisher were all exceptionally approachable. Lesser Swamp-warbler and African

Reed-warbler created some ID Headaches. Black Crake, Grosbeak Weaver, Village Indigobird, Klaas's Cuckoo, Goliath Heron, Fulvous Whistling-duck, Bronze Manikin, Common Waxbill were all seen along the way.

Day 5 Again we awoke to the sound of African Fish-eagles, a noise that will be sorely missed when we moved on from this hotel. Breakfast was taken early this morning so we could get the most from Wondo Genet. Birding started as soon as we left the vehicles when a flock of Sharp's Starlings appeared. White-cheeked Turaco, Mountain Wagtail, and Tambourine Dove were also seen. The uphill walk was tough in the heat but with some very rewarding birding. Species seen included Grey-headed Woodpecker, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Black-crowned Tchagra, Northern Puffback, Little Rock-thrush, Black Sawwing, Lesser Striped-swallow, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Black-and-white Manikin and Brown Woodland-warbler, whilst raptors were Long-crested Eagle, Crowned Eagle, Mountain Buzzard, Booted Eagle and Black Goshawk. Grivet Monkeys and Guereza Black-and-white Colobus monkeys were seen on a few occasions. A walk back down the hill took us to the hot springs, where watching steam coming out of the flowing stream and hot to the touch water was very strange!!! A very well deserved lunch stop was on the agenda with a rather large Hooded Vulture watching from a nearby tree, and as usual the mischievous Grivet Monkeys were doing their best to disrupt lunch. As lunch came to an end Sveta called everyone as she had located an Abyssinian Slaty-flycatcher. In the end not one but two very obliging birds were seen as well as Brown Warbler. After lunch we walked down into quite a steep ravine into a lovely valley for Half-collared Kingfisher but no luck!! During a long walk back up through the valley we found a few choice birds such as African Firefinch, Grey-backed Fiscal and White-rumped Babbler. Retracing our steps we headed back to the river to find a stunning Half-collared Kingfisher that managed to play hide and seek till everybody managed to get exceptional views. On our way back to the vehicles we stopped again at our first site of the day as it was now quieter. We managed to get good views of Abyssinian Ground-thrush and Yellow-fronted Parrot, a very good end to a good day.

Day 6 Our last morning waking to the sound of African Fish-eagles (or is it!!) before breakfast. At first light we counted at least 25 Silvery-cheeked Hornbills coming into the trees – what a huge bird!! We were soon on our way after breakfast for what was expected to be an incredible day travelling. Heading towards Goba we started to climb higher and higher and saw the now usual Moorland Chats, Groundscraper Thrush and Wattled Ibis. Solomon's next stop was quite a secretive affair till he announced that we were looking for owls with not just one but two possible. The ravine was steep and very hard going, but with the help of his local guides we soon were watching Cape Eagle-owl at its daytime roost. Then off went Solomon saying that the next stop along the valley was to see Abyssinian Long-eared Owl. A further trek along the valley into the ravine led to the bird which was simply stunning sat in a Juniper tree but fully viewable, amazing!!! It was good to see that the local community were actively involved in the conservation of the owls and had formed a co-operative to protect the area for birding groups for which they were financially rewarded by Solomon. We stopped at Dinsho Wetlands at 9000ft for lunch. We were so lucky with the weather as there were clear blue skies and stunning scenery while we sat and ate lunch. One of those special moments! Birds seen at the wetland included Common Greenshank, Yellow-billed Duck, Little Grebe, Rouget's Rail, Moorland Chat and Three-banded Plover. After lunch the journey continued with us searching for some highland specials. We soon found not one but several Abyssinian Longclaws, several flocks of Abyssinian Siskins and an African Stonechat. Mammals were not to be outdone and we saw Mountain Nyala, Bohar Reedbuck, Warhog and Olive Baboons. Moving onto The Bale Mountain National Park locally-found species seen were Abyssinian Catbird, Yellow-crowned Canary, Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk and a circling male Pallid Harrier. The only mammals were lovely male and female Menelik's Bushbuck. On the drive back to the hotel Solomon suddenly asked the vehicles to turn around as he had seen an African Hobby on a post – lovely views!! We arrived at the Waba Shebelle Hotel Goba at dusk. As people were just getting settled into their rooms the shout of "Nightjar" was heard, but after a scramble only a few people saw the bird before it disappeared – oh well!!

Day 7 At the pre-breakfast walk this morning around the grounds a Cinnamon Bracken-warbler was very vocal and seen very well by some and Chestnut-naped Francolin were the highlights. We left the hotel at around 07.00 to go to the heights of the Sanetti Plateau. We entered the Bale Mountain National Park and started to climb in altitude. The scenery just got better and better as we slowly watched the altimeter rise topping out at 13,500ft. Again we were so lucky to have cloudless blue skies that we could clearly see the second highest peak in Ethiopia, Mount Tullu Deemtu. The plateau is absolutely stunning and although with not so many birds, what was there was stunning. Steppe Eagles seemed to be everywhere and Augur Buzzard in both normal and dark phase were also common. Green and Common Sandpipers occurred frequently along with Red-throated Pipits and Moorland Francolins. Spot-breasted Lapwing were seen in low numbers. Solomon indicated a walk was required so off we went over the afro-alpine moorland. Suddenly he just stopped and called Wattled Crane – WOW. There were two birds just wandering around. Also seen were Ruddy Shelduck. Giant Mole Rats were seen and the more common Ethiopian Narrow-headed or Meadow Rats. As we reached the end of the plateau the realisation set in that we had not yet seen a wolf! Travelling down the other side of the plateau road brought some of the most spectacular scenery but some of the worst roads. Some birding was done on the down slope with a special subspecies Bale (Brown) Warbler and White-winged Tit being seen. A picnic lunch was taken at a roadside site before we began travelling back up onto the plateau. Expectations were high as all eyes turned to looking out for wolf but mile after mile went by with nothing!! Just when we were starting to give up hope Solomon called wolf and there it was about 50 yards away hunting for rats. After watching for a while we moved on seeing a further four wolves over the next few miles – amazing. Driving back down off the plateau on the way to the hotel a stop was made for Slender-billed Starlings and a nesting Verreaux's Eagle was seen on the cliff face, arriving back at our hotel at around 17.30. Our day was not yet finished as the plan was to look for nightjar again in the hotel grounds. Right on time the Abyssinian Nightjar arrived at 18.20 calling as it perched in a nearby tree!!

Day 8 Breakfast was very early this morning, at 05.30, to prepare for a long drive. A few roadside stops produced Rosy-patched Bushshrike, Yellow-necked Spurfowl, the first Kori Bustards and White-crowned Starlings. Descending some 1600m into the broad-leaved and acacia woodland of the dry area of Sof Omar, the road into the valley had deteriorated so much that the vehicles couldn't get down it so we had to walk the remaining distance into the valley. Birds came thick and fast including Northern Brownbul, Emerald Spotted Wood-dove, Von der Decken's Hornbill, Northern Red-billed Hornbill, Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Shining Sunbird, White-browed Coucal, Black Woodhoopoe, Blue Rock-thrush, Rufous Chatterer, Brown-tailed Chat, Pearl-spotted Owlet, White Helmetshrike, Yellow-breasted Apalis and two African Hawk-eagles soared around above us. We had some difficulty locating the main target species Salvadori's Serin, but after Solomon's decision to cross over to the other side of the valley everything suddenly kicked in with birds everywhere. Suddenly there were Somali Tits, Salvadori's Serin, Fork-tailed Drongo, Crimson-rumped Waxbill, Slate-coloured Boubou, Cardinal Woodpecker, Blue-breasted Bee-eaters, Reichenow's Seedeater, Bristle-crowned Starling and Greater Honeyguide. The walk back up the ravine was long hard and very hot. It took us some time to get back to the vehicles but lunch was ready when we arrived and gave us the time to recover. After lunch we set off in the vehicles but quickly stopped for a stunning male Straw-tailed Whydah that was very close. Again birds appeared everywhere more Salvadori's Serins, Eastern Chanting-goshawk and more Reichenow's Seedeater's another roadside stop showed two obliging juvenile Gabar Goshawks. We arrived back at the hotel around 17.30.

Day 9 An early breakfast this morning for a long journey back over the Sanetti Plateau and down into the Hareenna Forest. The usual highland birds were being seen as we crossed the plateau with a couple of Pallid Harriers and Red-billed Choughs being thrown in as well. Luckily, two more Simien Wolves were seen making a total of seven in all. Several birding stops in the Hareenna forest brought Abyssinian Crimsonwing, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and a beautiful Crowned Hawk-eagle which just sat watching us at close range. A flock of migrating European Bee-eaters was the

next stop. Lunch was taken with a keen eye on the time as we needed to get to Genale River area, the home of Prince Ruspoli's Turaco. We managed to get there around 16.00, which is an ideal time due to the heat of day just starting to die off. Almost immediately after starting the walk two birds appeared albeit difficult views then a third bird appeared, it was almost as though the birds were flying around us giving us superb flying views and also posing out in the open for some seriously good views, but just as quick as they had arrived they went but what a privileged few minutes we all had. The journey continued with us arriving at the Konjo Pension Hotel around 18.30. Although the hotel was basic it was clean and allowed a good night's sleep.

Day 10 First light saw us out on the balcony of the hotel watching the drivers and Solomon cooking breakfast!! And wow, the porridge was stunning, after which birding started with a drive east to the Liben Plains. As usual many roadside stops occurred first producing Ethiopian Swallows on the wires, Lilac-breasted Roller, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush and Scaly Chatterer. Solomon then called two Wattled Lapwings that he explained was certainly not what he expected. Also seen were Black-headed Herons, White-crowned Starlings and a look across the plains gave views of 30–40 Lesser Kestrels hunting in the open plains. Birds seemed to be everywhere with two Temminck's Coursers, nine Kori Bustards and a lonesome Wattled Crane!!! Arriving at the plains we saw a Tawny Eagle sitting up on a pylon getting the warmth of the morning sun. The group set out onto the plains and were met by a lovely lady who explained that she was part of a group studying the habitat and working to protect the breeding area of the Liben Lark. Solomon had arranged for her to be there to help find these now-endangered birds. As we spread out to maximise efforts people suddenly appeared waving official papers saying we were not allowed to be there but as usual diplomatic Solomon came to the rescue and we were soon seeing not one but two Liben Larks at very close range. ID challenges between Long-billed Pipit and Buffy Pipit were soon resolved and several very confiding Somali Short-toed Larks were seen. Several Crowned Lapwings walked around while we had a merry dance trying to find Pectoral-patch Cisticola, which eventually some of the group managed to catch up with. As we turned to go back to the vehicles a male Pallid Harrier quartered across the plain – STUNNING. Afternoon birding was around the Negele area with Wattled and Shelley's Starlings, European Roller, Brubru, Somali Bunting, Red-fronted Barbet, Vitelline Masked-waver and Red-backed Scrub-robin. The best was yet to come as Solomon called Three-banded Courser. It was then a cat and mouse game until eventually one bird at last sat in a place that allowed a full view of the bird – WOW!! Back at the hotel with dusk having fallen the nightjar responded to calls and Donaldson-smith's Nightjar sat 10ft from us allowing amazing views.

Day 11 A 05.30 start was called for this morning for a long journey to Yabello. Solomon and Sveta were concerned that we made it to several important areas before the heat got too high, but road conditions and some new birds kept delaying our progress. Black-winged Lapwing were the first star turn, Kori and White-bellied Bustards, Pygmy Falcon, Rufous-crowned Roller and Lilac-breasted Rollers, Orange-bellied Parrot, Golden-breasted Starling, White-winged Widowbird and Blue-naped Mousebirds were all seen well. A breakfast stop brought more nice birding with D'Arnauds Barbet, Green-winged Pytilia, Black Scimitarbill, Wahlberg's Eagle, Bare-eyed Thrush and Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike. Underway again the road got worse and the delays lengthened and Martial Eagle and Rufous-tailed Shrike were added but Sveta's obvious concern grew that we would miss some key birds. We pulled off the road down a dirt track to the key site for White-winged Collared-dove, a very range-restricted bird. It was late morning and extremely hot but we set off following the Dawa River. Hunters and Black-bellied Sunbird were soon added to our list with Green and Common Sandpipers and Senegal Thick-knee, Grey Kestrel and male and female Juba Weavers. It seemed the concern of arriving too late was justified as there was no sign of the dove although Solomon and Sveta tried very hard to locate one. Oh well you can't win them all, but we did get Juba Weaver!!!! As we started the very hot walk back to the vehicles the clouds gathered and the rain started. Just as we got back to the

cars the rain got worse and everyone was soon dripping wet but it was great way to cool down!!! The drive continued with several groups of Vulturine Guinea-fowl on the road but the rain got worse and worse and fields became rivers, rivers became torrents and we were amazed how the landscape changed. Continuing south the rain eased and things brightened. Suddenly a shout came over the radio HORNBILL in the field, and we were treated to the sight of FIVE Abyssinian Ground-hornbills feeding!!! Arriving in the dusk light at the Yabello Hotel – it had been a long hard but satisfying day.

Day 12 A pre-breakfast walk was called for 06.30 and anticipation was high for some special birds, particularly Stresemann's Bush-crow!! The bird was soon seen though at a distance. However soon after it birds were seen feeding on the ground in front of us. Four of these birds kept us happy until the rain started again and sent people scurrying back in the direction of the hotel. On the walk back Speke's Weaver was seen busy nesting and Sveta pointed out Northern Masked-weaver within the same colony. Fan-tailed Ravens, Rüppell's Glossy-starling and Reichenow's Seedeater were also seen but the rain kept coming so we retreated for breakfast. Luckily after breakfast the rain had moved away so we headed further south towards the Kenyan border. Roadside stops occurred frequently with wonderful delights. Pied Cuckoo was seen in a bush and the endemic White-tailed Swallows flew around sometimes passing with feet of us!! Purple Grenadier and Stresemann's Bush-crow occurred quite commonly for a while!! We were soon turning off the lovely tarmac road back onto our usual roads – very bumpy, dry and dusty. Roadside stops led to huge numbers of birds, Grey-capped and Black-capped Social-weavers were everywhere, Black-shouldered Kite, Namaqua Dove, White-headed Buffalo-weaver, European Hoopoe, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Pale Prinia were all seen. Horus and Alpine Swifts suddenly appeared and disappeared. Large groups of Lesser Kestrels alongside a few Common Kestrels were seen hunting in the lovely morning light over the plains. Solomon decided a walk was in order and asked everyone to fan out to cover a larger area. Somali Courser was the target and some 10–15 minutes later a call went out that two birds were being 'scoped. As we got closer two lovely Somali Coursers allowed really good close views. White-bellied Bustard was then called and then we turned back around to see a huge Kori Bustard in flight WOW!! For the next hour or so birds kept coming with two more coursers and Taita Fiscal and Somali Fiscal caused some ID headaches. Short-tailed Larks were next with people almost standing on the birds before they flew. Lunch was called and as usual the drivers had already set everything up with the coffee already on the boil. Grant's Gazelle and Gerenuk were seen grazing in the distance as we sat and ate lunch. A sudden downpour sent us running for cover in the vehicles. Afternoon birding was off and on with rain showers. Somali Ostrich was spotted by Solomon some distance away but as we scanned around several more male and female birds were seen. Chestnut Weaver and Shelley's Sparrows were soon identified moving around with the large numbers of Grey-capped Social-weavers, Pringles Puffback, Northern Grosbeak-canary, Banded Warbler, Bateleur and a very stubborn Red-naped Bushshrike which had everybody getting views of bits of the bird flitting around. Time soon passed by and found us heading back to the hotel before dark.

Day 13 Solomon called for a pre-breakfast drive this morning to try to locate a couple of missing birds. Straight away singing on a wire was Foxy Lark! A short stop for a walk found Brown Snake-eagle, Rosy-patched Shrike, Rattling Cisticola, Red-winged Starling and White-browed Sparrow-weaver. After a very successful hour, back for breakfast was the call to prepare for a long day's driving back up the Rift Valley to Lake Langano. While the vehicles were being loaded Broad-ringed White-eye's were noted feeding young in the grounds of the hotel and a positive ID on Hunter's Sunbird was made from Sveta's accurate description of its shoulder markings. We were soon off, heading north on the tarmac. Whoops, too soon to make that comment as the road is under massive reconstruction with some good areas and some extremely bad areas. Most of the journey was nondescript but a few roadside stops occurred with Hemprich's Hornbill being the main bird with a proper view for everyone at last. A roadside wetland area

provided the one and only Woolly-necked Stork of the trip along with several other more common birds such as Hadada Ibis, Grey Heron, Sacred Ibis and Hamerkop. The journey was long and we arrived in the dark to the smartly named Shimba Beach Resort. Solomon informed us that this was the first time he had stayed there since its refurbishment and we all thought it all looked very good!!

Day 14 The crack of dawn warranted a visit down to the lakeside edged by steep cliffs on one side. A huge lake spread out in front, what a view as the sun came up and yes, the return of the African Fish-eagle morning chorus!! Lots of birds started moving around including Slate-coloured Boubou, Northern Black-flycatcher, and Egyptian (cliff) Goose!! Gull-billed Tern, Willow Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, African Thrush and Abyssinian Thrush, Common Redstart (*samamisticus*), Eurasian Hoopoe, Little Rock-thrush all before the pre-breakfast walk!! The walk started with African Paradise-flycatcher – a lovely male, Swainson’s Sparrow, White-winged Cliff-chat, Bearded and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Rüppell’s Robin-chat, Speckled Mousebird, Plain Martin, African Citril, Spectacled Weaver and Rufous-throated Wryneck. Solomon had his contacts out looking for Verreaux’s Eagle-owl and not long after they had located one!! Not one but three flew into a tree very close giving everyone amazing views. Moving on we had good although quick views of Abyssinian Wheatear, a very rare bird!! A lovely Masked Shrike sitting in the sun was quickly followed along with Rüppell’s Weaver, Eurasian Wryneck, Black Scimitarbill, White-winged Black-tit, and Helmeted Guineafowl all before breakfast – amazing!! After breakfast a small drive to an area called Bishangari. The area consisted of forest/scrub/lake and open plain areas. Close to the entrance we were suddenly seeing male and female Abyssinian Ground-hornbills. They were so close you didn’t need binoculars!! Eurasian Hoopoe, Crowned Lapwing and two more Verreaux’s Eagle-owls were also seen. Entering into the complex soon produced lots of birds. First we headed towards the forest area where lots of Olive Baboons and Guereza Black-and-white Colobus monkeys were seen. Lots of Yellow and Grey Wagtails, Grey-backed Fiscal and Black-billed Woodhoopoe were seen. Into the forest the call was played of Narina Trogon that soon responded giving everyone absolutely perfect views of this difficult bird. Next came Lesser Honeyguide, African Paradise-flycatcher, Yellow-fronted Parrot, and then a skulky Lemon Dove hiding in the undergrowth. By this time we had gathered a large contingent of children who unfortunately started to get a bit too noisy for quiet forest birding so Solomon called time out for lunch. During lunch birds carried on coming with White-rumped Babblers, Red-billed Firefinch, and a stunning Lemon Dove coming down to a water fountain just feet away. Red-headed Weavers were nesting, Double-toothed and Banded Barbet, Black-headed Batis and Black Cuckooshrike were also present. After lunch was lake time!! Some of the group opted to stay at the lodge and relax for a few hours whilst others set off for a walk. Lots of waders were to be found in a quiet marshy area with African Snipe, Little and Temminck’s Stint, Ruff, Wood, Common, Green, Curlew and Marsh Sandpipers, Whiskered, Gull-billed, White-winged and Black Terns all in non-breeding plumage caused some ID headaches, Black-winged Stilt, African Spoonbill, Pink-backed and Great White Pelican, African Fish-eagle, Squacco Herons, egrets – there was so much stuff and not enough time to wade through looking for the obscure. All too soon it was time to leave but there was one last good bird to be seen on the drive with an amazing spot by Solomon who pointed out a Diederik Cuckoo sat in a tree!!! Back to Lake Langano and our hotel for 17.30. We tried for Freckled Nightjar this evening but it was seen only by a few of the group.

Day 15 Another pre-breakfast walk this morning at 06.15 as Solomon was aiming to find the missing Clapperton’s Francolin. So we tried and tried, hearing it calling several times but no luck, just fresh Leopard Prints!!!! Was this the reason the dogs were barking in the night? Lots of birds seen on the walk but only Little Weaver were new to the list. On leaving the hotel Solomon said he had a couple of lovely birds to see not far away so we headed off not far down the road. We pulled into a hotel complex and again Solomon’s scouts were off. Almost straight away we were watching not one but five Slender-tailed Nightjars, they were so well camouflaged but we were so close, again a

quick shout came in and we were looking at a Greyish Eagle-owl, WOW!! talk about being in the know!!! Just a quick walk around gave good views of Spotted Flycatcher, Greater Honeyguide, Grey-backed Camaroptera, African Paradise-flycatcher what an hour's birding. We were then underway on tarmac back up the Rift Valley with a few stops being made along the way. At a large area of water two Black Crowned-cranes and several Common Cranes and both Lesser and Greater Flamingoes were seen. Lots of Northern Carmine Bee-Eaters were noted on the wires in one area as we drove through. A further stop was made for a stunning male Eastern Paradise-whydah. The next stop was for Chestnut-backed and Chestnut-headed Sparrow-larks. When both of these birds were duly found our next stop was the Fantale Crater lava fields. The next 30 minutes or so can only be described as an ID nightmare. First Blackstart was called, a very plain-looking bird. Then Isabelline Wheatear was the call and the question of whether or not we were looking at Sombre Chat was posed. We started following the birds around the lava but always the birds landed in difficult light. We persevered until with some patience the key ID points were noted and we were happy that we had Blackstart, Sombre Chat and Isabelline Wheatear nailed!! Arriving at the entrance to Awash National Park the first Abyssinian Roller was noted. A short walk provided an Ashy Prinia, another 15km drive into the park saw us arriving at the Awash Falls Lodge a Eco Friendly complex next to Awash Falls, the view point overlooking the falls left everybody stunned by the beauty, and a wonderful night's sleep was had to the sound of the waterfalls.

Day 16 Our pre-breakfast walk was at 06.00 into the park. Birds of note included Red-billed Firefinch, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Tawny Eagle, White-bellied Go-away-bird, Woodland Kingfisher, Bruce's Green-pigeon, Eastern Grey Plantain-eater, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, two Little Sparrowhawks, flocks of Red-billed Quelea, Nile Valley Sunbird and Madagascar Bee-eater giving a lovely hours birding before breakfast. All we can say is the French Toast!! – a specialty of the lodge for breakfast, was AMAZING. Soon after breakfast the morning drive began around the tracks of the national park. The four vehicles were split into two groups to cover two areas swopping over their routes later. Two White-bellied Bustards soon appeared and Woodchat Shrikes and Southern Grey Shrikes seemed to be common all of sudden, perched up on the trees as shrikes do!! Gemsbok, Beisa Oryx and Soemmerling Gazelles were grazing out on the plains and Kori Bustard was soon picked up. Two Flappet Larks were added to the growing list before the lunch call was made with a journey into Awash town to a restaurant owned by a very hospitable Greek lady. We then headed north into the open grass plains. The road is the arterial link from Djibouti into Ethiopia's dry ports so lorry after lorry made the journey more difficult. Solomon suddenly stopped the vehicles asking cars 1 and 2 to turn around. He had somehow seen a Buff-crested Bustard just off the road, a bird that the first two cars had missed earlier on – excellent!! Hamadryas Baboons were seen from the side of road. We then pulled up adjacent to some wide open grassland's and started to walk out across a large open area when cries of bustard went up. Not one but three Arabian Bustards were soon in view. A quick walk to try to get closer and Solomon was off like a Duracell Bunny and he managed to get around to the other side of the birds almost pushing them back towards us. One bird took flight and gave us amazing flight views. A shout from behind pointed out a flock of sandgrouse flying across. They came down in a nearby field so slowly we got closer and closer, ID soon came as Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and 25 birds were counted!! A long journey back to Awash was again really difficult with lorry after lorry making the journey bad for the drivers.

Day 17 No pre-breakfast walk this morning so we went out on our own for a walk. African Grey Hornbill, Ethiopian Boubou, White-rumped Babbler, Crested Francolin, Fan-tailed Raven, Crimson-rumped Waxbill, Black-crowned Tchagra and Nile Valley Sunbird were all seen. Following another excellent breakfast and loading of the vehicles we had a further drive around the park before leaving. This produced Gillett's Lark and Flappet Lark for those who had not already seen it, Northern Carmine and Madagascar Bee-Eaters and a lovely male Bateleur. Solomon took us to a viewpoint over the Kirayawa Gorge that gave stunning views which were simply breathtaking!! To top it all a new

bird, Red-fronted Warbler, was seen well. We then made tracks out of the park and started the long journey back to Addis Ababa arriving back in the capital around 17.00. We made our way back at the Ghion Hotel where day rooms had been booked so that we could freshen up and change. However this wasn't the end of the birding as Sveta hadn't given up on the elusive Abyssinian Woodpecker that we had managed to miss out on several occasions during the trip. Thanks to her perseverance several of us managed to get good views in the hotel grounds. We had our last meal, enormous amounts of wonderful pizza, and then returned to the airport for our 01.55 departure to Heathrow. Here we said our goodbyes to Solomon and the four wonderful drivers and everyone headed for check-in.

CONCLUSION: Ethiopia is an absolutely stunning country that left everybody astonished by its beauty!! It is a third-world country in Africa where tourists and tourism hotels are still few and far between. Electricity can be patchy and water can come and go but it's a bird-rich country that is well worth the visit. Early starts are required and long days on what can be difficult roads are needed but a birder with a sense of adventure will truly love the country!!

OF COURSE THE THANKS: A special thanks must go to Solomon for all his planning, his superb knowledge and incredible eyesight, his patience day after day in keeping everything together. His organizational skills in arranging lunches/dinners that ran to time remembering that this is AFRICA!! Thanks also to Sveta for her incredible bird ID skills and not being afraid to question bird ID when things didn't seem right. It was refreshing for two very experienced bird guides to have open discussions to ensure the correct ID was made. The next thanks go to the four fantastic drivers who every day were up before us and were still working after we had gone to bed ensuring that the vehicles were clean only for us to make them dirty again in no time. They made breakfasts and lunches whilst at birding sites and on top of all that they drove on some incredibly difficult roads, and everyday had a smile on their faces. **A MEANINGFULL AND HEARTFELT THANKS TO THOSE GUYS.**

This tour report is from the notes and memories of Annette and Steve Phillips. As we are now getting old and senile we are not to be held responsible for any inaccuracies!!!