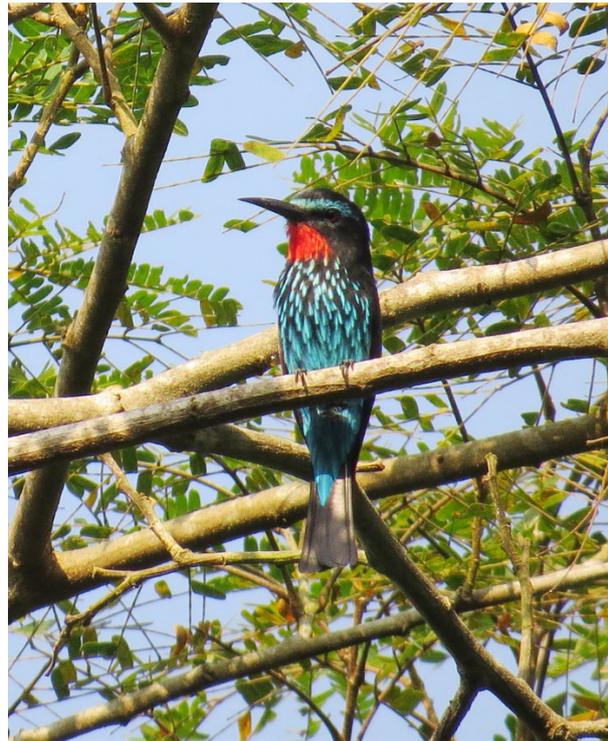


Ghana

15 November–1 December 2018

Participants

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**Led by Paul Mensah
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Black Bee-eater

A personal report by Martin Tribe

After a relatively uneventful couple of flights to get us all to Accra, the Birdfinders group for the 2018 trip to Ghana assembled and were met by Paul Mensah of Ashanti African Tours as we left the airport. Our first goal was to get some money changed and after doing so, and noting Laughing Doves and Black Kites, we boarded a small coach for the journey east to Tema, arriving at our hotel after dark but in time for dinner and to meet Bob who had come in a few days earlier.

Day 1 Our first morning was to be at Shai Hills Resource Reserve, an area of rocky hills and savannah grasslands. En route we did a quick stop for a few Piapiacs in a palm tree then arrived at Shai Hills for our first proper birding. Paul took the lead and quickly found us a Buff-spotted Woodpecker, followed by a couple of Grey-backed Camaropteras and the ubiquitous Black (Yellow-billed) Kites. As we walked along a path with woodland either side we added Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Common Wattle-eye. A few winter-visiting Pied Flycatchers were found and, as the woodland opened to wooded savannah, we added Laughing Dove and a perching-quietly African Grey Hornbill. Paul said he could hear Short-winged Cisticolas and sure enough we soon saw them, diverting briefly as two Senegal Parrots flew over. As we walked along the path we added Vinaceous Dove, Bronze Manakin and Pied Crow. A fairly-distant but scopable Cardinal Woodpecker was found close to a Northern Black-flycatcher, and two very colourful Yellow-crowned Gonoleks appeared in the same tree. Whilst watching these birds a perching Tambourine Dove put in an appearance and Violet Turacos could be heard calling nearby. A Grey-headed Bristlebill was heard and gave brief views and two Western Plantain-eaters flew over.

We arrived close to some rocky outcrops and were soon admiring a pair, later three, Mocking Cliff-chats up on the rocks. A Fork-tailed Drongo was found, soon followed by a Blue-spotted Wood-dove. In a tree by the side of the path we found two Viellot's Barbets and a Spotted Flycatcher. A female Violet-backed Starling was located, and was joined, briefly, by a male. Perched Cooper Sunbird and Red-necked Buzzard were next to be added to our growing list followed by another African Grey Hornbill, three Double-spurred Francolins on the path ahead of us, and two Croaking Cisticolas. Our

final birds before we were picked up by the bus were three colourful Violet Turacos, not sitting still for long but showing nicely.

As the bus took us further along the track we'd been walking we did a quick stop for two Bearded Barbets and saw another 10 Double-spurred Francolins on the track.

The bus dropped us off at the base of a hill where we quickly noted a soaring Red-necked Buzzard. We headed up another path ascending the hill and came across two Brown Babblers. A Grey Woodpecker was found and we tried for Oriole Warbler at a few places but with no success. Two Rock Martins were seen flying around the rocky outcrops and a Grey-backed Camaroptera showed well for those of us who hadn't made the extra walk up the hill to see fruit bats. The walks back down added another Common Wattle-eye, Brown and Blackcap Babblers and an elusive Oriole Warbler. We also found a Tawny-flanked Prinia at the base of the hill, along with a nearby Klaas's Cuckoo and two soaring Red-necked Buzzards.

As we again drove along the track heading back to the reserve entrance we stopped for both Rufous-crowned and two Blue-bellied Rollers.

We left Shai Hills and decided to miss out on Sakamona Lagoon in favour of a stop at Winneba Plains. En route we noted Common and Grey Kestrels, Shikra, Black and Black-winged Kites, Hooded Vulture, Western Reef-egret and Northern Grey-headed Sparrows.

Our first stop in the Winneba area was a lagoon. The water level was quite high but we managed to add Black-winged Stilt, four Spur-winged Lapwings, Whimbrel, Long-tailed Cormorant, Sandwich Tern, Common Sandpiper, Striated Heron and Pied Kingfisher.

At the place known as Winneba plains, more lightly-wooded savannah, we quickly spotted five White-throated Bee-eaters on wires above the road and found two Bar-breasted Firefinches and a Bronze Manakin feeding at the edge of the road. Paul found a singing Red-winged Prinia and we could hear calling Green Turacos. We walked a little way into the savannah and found Red-eyed Dove and a male Splendid Sunbird. An African Hobby did a fly past and we heard Simple Greenbul, which Paul said we didn't need to worry about as we'd see them later. Paul tried luring in the Green Turacos and his persistence paid off when we located two birds. As we left the area we added African Pied Wagtail and later a Lanner Falcon.

On the way to Rainforest Lodge we stopped at one of Paul's sites and were shown a colony of Slender-billed Weavers, amongst which we found two Grosbeak Weavers. Also here were hundreds of Little Swifts. Finally for the day, we had four Black-crowned Night-herons fly alongside the bus for a while.

Day 2 Today was our first visit to Kakum Forest. The first birds we saw, which were quite common here, were African Green-pigeons, and we soon added African Pied Hornbill, the commonest hornbill in the forested areas of Ghana. A Black-throated Coucal was heard and a Green Crombec put in a very brief appearance. We walked up the path to the start of the canopy walkway. The circular walkway extends between about five trees and is safe, although somewhat wobbly at times. The platforms around the trees themselves are pleasingly stable! We split into two groups, each with a Ghanaian guide. I and a few others went in one direction with Paul and the other group went the other way. We scanned the surrounding trees and began seeing canopy-dwelling birds. Chestnut-breasted Nigrita was the first to be noted, followed by a flyover Palmnut Vulture and two fly-past Red-fronted Parrots. Some birds were seen feeding in the top of a nearby tree and we identified Black-winged Oriole, Preuss's Weaver and Red-headed Malimbe. In a closer tree were Naked-faced Barbets and a Blue-throated Brown Sunbird. Paul called in a Melancholy Woodpecker, which stayed high above us and Splendid Starlings flew in and out of the tree we were in. Continual searching gradually added birds to the list: Green Hylia, Slender-billed Greenbul and Little Grey Greenbul were followed by a perched Velvet-mantled Drongo and a passing Yellow-mantled Weaver working its way through the leaves. A Brown-cheeked Hornbill put in an appearance soon followed by a fly-over by a Red-chested Goshawk. A small group of Chestnut-winged Starlings were found nearby and scanning the skies added Square-tailed and Fanti

Saw-wings, Cassin's and Sabine's Spinetails and African Palm-swifts. Four Purple Herons flying past was a bit unexpected. Birds just kept coming with a nice view of a Blue Malkoha (Yellowbill), Yellow-billed Barbet and, in our tree, White-headed Woodhoopoes and a Speckled Tinkerbird.

For a lot of the time we had been in the canopy a Congo Serpent-eagle had been calling. It wasn't responsive to being lured in though. However, after it had stopped calling it suddenly put in an appearance flying through the forest and eventually landing in a tree where we could scope it: well, the lower half of it anyway. Still, a great bird to get.

A grey bird in the top of a lower tree had me asking Paul what this was and he identified it as Sharpe's Apalis. A Spotted Greenbul was found in a different tree and a Cassin's Hawk-eagle flew over. A Grey-headed Nigrita was found followed by Little Green Sunbirds and a White-breasted Nigrita. Then another raptor flew over and was identified as Ayres's Hawk-eagle. A Green Sunbird was found and yet another raptor turned out to be a European Honey-buzzard. A fine male Buff-throated Sunbird showed nicely followed by a Grey Kestrel and a dull bird amongst the leaves turned out to be Ansorge's Greenbul. Paul heard but couldn't lure in a Blue Cuckooshrike and the final bird we found was Lemon-bellied Crombec.

We left the canopy walkway and headed back to the carpark. A small diversion down a track, caused by a very brief view of a flying-away White-crested Hornbill, proved to be very interesting. There was an ant swarm, that some found to their cost as the ants do tend to bite if you stand amongst them. The ants had attracted some good birds: White-tailed Ant-thrush and Fire-crested (White-tailed) Alethe. Also nearby we located Blue-billed Malimbe, Icterine Greenbul and Grey-headed Bristlebill, and heard Grey Longbill. Finally for the morning, back near the carpark, we added Splendid Sunbird and some saw a few Tit-hylas.

After a break for lunch and a short rest we headed back to Kakum. En route we found numerous Barn and Ethiopian Swallows, two Mosque Swallows, a Mottled Spinetail and some Cattle Egrets and Northern Grey-headed Sparrows. In the carpark we added four White-throated Bee-eaters.

The path back up to the canopy walkway added a seen Grey Longbill, and heard African Emerald Cuckoo and Plain (Cameroon Sombre) Greenbul. After again negotiating the bouncing walkways we settled into another session of birding the canopy. A Hairy-breasted Barbet was found as was an African (Fraser's) Forest-flycatcher. Yellow-spotted Barbet was then located followed by a sitting-still White-crested Hornbill. Little Green Sunbirds were in our tree and an African Harrier-hawk and two Palm-nut Vultures flew past. Ussher's Flycatcher was next to be found, courtesy of the other group, and a Rufous-crowned Eremomela was in our tree. Two Collared Sunbirds we seen and heard and then seen were two Yellow-billed Turacos. Our final bird from the platform was a very-blue Blue Cuckooshrike, and as we got to the platform the others had been on we saw a Blue-throated Roller, a bird they'd been watching for some time.

The final Kakum bird of the day took about an hour or so's hard work but was eventually worth it. After relocating here and there we were finally called back to an earlier location and as we arrived and rounded the corner we were met with not one but two Akun Eagle-owls! After a short while one flew off but the other stayed to delight us all.

Day 3 En route towards Kakum our bus broke down! It had a battery problem. Leaving our excellent driver, Enim, to sort things out we went for a walk in what looked like just an open area of ground with a few grasses and small bushes. It didn't look to hopeful for birds but we gave it a go. Of course, it turned out to be worth it. As expected Pied Crow and Common Bulbul were seen. Two Northern Fiscals were seen on overhead wires and Bronze Manakins, Bar-breasted Firefinches and Pin-tailed Whydahs were feeding amongst the grasses and a singing bird turned out to be a Red-faced Cisticola. A Simple Greenbul was found on a nearby ruined building and we found a pair of Compact Weavers, our only ones of the trip. As we walked back to the bus a large group of people from the nearby village jogged past singing loudly, doing their morning exercise.

Another of Ashanti's buses drove past, albeit smaller than our bus, and gave us a lift to a near to Abrafo Forest, which is where we were planning to do a morning's birding. Paul was immediately hunting for birds and found us a Puvell's Illadopsis (very skulking) and then a Western Bluebill. A Green-headed Sunbird was found as were Olive-bellied Sunbird, Little Greenbul and Black-headed (Red-bellied) Paradise-flycatcher. As we walked down the track we added Superb and Olive Sunbirds and a Speckled Tinkerbird. Some birds on a very distant tree could be made out to be Rosy Bee-eaters but the view was very distant.

A stop by a village gave us Village Weaver, Slender-billed Greenbul, White-throated Bee-eater, Violet-backed Starlings and a Senegal Coucal. Paul heard and called in a Brown-crowned Tchagra and a nice red male Black-winged Bishop was found followed by a Green Crombec and a Woodland Kingfisher. Whistling Cisticola was next to be found followed by a scan of a weaver colony comprising Village and Viellot's (Black) Weavers. Another scoped tree added better views of ten Rosy Bee-eaters.

Continuing down the track we found a female Buff-throated Sunbird and then a much-wanted bird: Black Bee-eater, two birds seen very well. A Black-and-white Manakin was found followed by Collared Sunbird. Some of us then did a walk to get closer to a tree favoured by Rosy Bee-eaters. We found at least 100 birds and had excellent views of them. Also here was a Western Black-headed Oriole and on the walk back we had another male Black-winged Bishop.

We boarded the now-fixed bus but soon stopped for a pair of African Shrike-flycatchers in a tree by the side of the road.

Next stop was Twifo Praso River for two special birds, both of which we saw. After a couple of minutes' walk from the bus to the river we quickly located our first target, Rock Pratincole, three birds on nearby rocks. Two Common Sandpipers and two Little Bee-eaters were found followed by our second target: White-throated Blue Swallow. The swallows were a bit distant so we drove across the river bridge to get closer and saw them well.

Later that afternoon we were back at Abrafo Forest where we had birded in the morning. Senegal Coucal and African Pied Hornbill were seen as was a Didric Cuckoo and at least three Yellow White-eyes. A Whistling Cisticola was singing nearby and both Velvet-mantled Drongo and Little Greenbul were found. Where the woods got a bit thicker we heard Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo but it didn't want to show itself.

Darkness was falling so we gathered by the bus and Paul played the call of Brown Nightjar. A bird appeared almost instantly and was seen briefly in torchlight. Fortunately for us it then landed very close by on a branch by the side of the track and stayed there as the photographers had a field day. Leaving the bird alone we drove to another site and lured in a Black-shouldered Nightjar, seen well flying above us but not landing. We still had a final site to visit and after a short drive we were again out and this time in more open country and it wasn't long before we were all admiring a Fraser's Eagle-owl! This is how all night birding ought to be. And to add to that, we had a brief view of a Long-tailed Nightjar sitting on the road as we drove back to the hotel.

Day 4 As yesterday we visited Abrafo Forest getting another male Black-winged Bishop on the way. On arrival we were greeted by Sabine's Spinetails and a Preuss's Swallow, quickly followed by an Orange-cheeked Waxbill and two, perched African Cuckoo-hawks. The Whistling Cisticola was singing from its usual perch and Little Greenbul and Fanti Saw-wing we seen. This time we went deeper into the forest rather than down a wide track. Here we found another Chestnut-breasted Nigrita and heard Yellow-billed Turacos. Paul led us through some trackless forest where we tried for Rufous-sided Broadbill, and to our delight a bird showed well. Back on the slightly-more obvious track Paul found Swamp Palm Bulbuls and Olive Sunbird. In a somewhat more open area we lined up to see what we could find: Honeyguide Greenbul, Icterine Greenbul, Western Bearded Greenbul, Fraser's Sunbird, West African Wattle-eye and Maxwell's Black Weaver were the result of a few frantic minutes birding. We stayed at the site and had another Honeyguide Greenbul, an adult and a juvenile Blue-billed Malimbe and two Blue Malkohas (Yellowbills). Some people also saw a Buff-spotted Woodpecker.

We then walked further into the forest where Paul found a female Fire-bellied Woodpecker and a male was heard drumming. We had a very-high-up Yellow-spotted Barbet and two perched Fanti Saw-wings. A Yellow-browed Camaroptera was called in and we heard Red-tailed Greenbul. A Brown-cheeked Hornbill was then found and two Copper-tailed Starlings flew quickly overhead. We managed only to hear Kemp's Longbill. As we drove away from this site we found two African Firefinches feeding on the road.

We were now heading for Ankasa with a couple of stops on the way. Our first stop was a lake that held African Jacana, Eurasian Moorhen, Cattle Egret, Anhinga and our target bird, Orange Weaver. These are very attractive weavers. The second stop was at a tidal river with mangroves. Here we had Brown Sunbird and Malachite Kingfisher and two or three of our next target bird, Reichenbach's Sunbird. We then continued on to our camp at Ankasa. That night we were treated to a very impressive tropical storm with thunder and lightning and a lot of rain. Still, our tents were undercover so we stayed dry.

Day 5 This morning we boarded landrovers and headed into the forest. Due to the storm last night there were various bits of tree down on the track we followed, and eventually we came across a downed tree that was too large to deal with with the ubiquitous machetes so we left the landrovers and continued on foot. Grey-throated Flycatcher and Forest Robin were heard but would not come out to be seen but the Chocolate-backed Kingfisher Andy found behaved much better. We continued on hearing birds but not managing to lure them out despite every effort to do so: Blue-headed Crested-flycatcher, Red-chested Owlet and White-spotted Flufftail were heard but not seen. However, we did find Crested Malimbe, Fraser's Sunbird, Icterine Greenbul, West African Wattle-eye and then heard and saw a Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo.

Our goal was to check three quiet woodland ponds so we had to be quiet. The first one, with the largest amount of open water looked good for kingfishers but was quiet when we got there. The second was far more vegetated and also quiet but the third one gave up the treasure we sought as, after a few minutes searching, a fine Hartlaub's Duck flew up and directly away from us to disappear into nearby vegetation. Also here we managed brief views of a very skulking Black-bellied Seedcracker.

We walked back to the first pond where Merv found an African Finfoot was found going back and forth in a shady part of the pond, and a Blue-throated Roller was seen high up on a nearby tree.

We stopped for lunch, and as we finished we noted two Swamp Palm Bulbuls, nine African Pied Hornbills and two Splendid Starlings. A short walk into the forest yielded a very-hard-to-see Forest Robin.

The goal for the afternoon was to again walk that track that went past the three ponds. Soon after starting we heard and then saw a superb Great Blue Turaco. At first it stayed hidden in trees but then it flew and landed in an open tree for all to admire. A much-wanted bird for all of us. Nearby Paul found a perched Western Bronze-naped Pigeon after having heard them calling in the area.

At the first pond we had a decision to make. Stay at this pond and wait for kingfishers or walk to the third pond for the chance of Hartlaub's Duck again. A small group of us opted for the latter option and left the others to watch the first pond and they did see White-bellied Kingfisher. At the third pond we didn't relocate the duck but we did get some good birds. First were two Red-billed Helmetshrikes high up in trees, then a Piping Hornbill coming to what looked like a nest hole. We saw three Great Blue Turacos and a perching Copper-tailed Starling. Nearby we found the occupied nest of Red-vented Malimbe.

We walked back to the first pond where we planned to stay until dark, and during the time we waited we found the White-bellied Kingfisher and saw three Yellow-billed Turacos and a Tambourine Dove. As dusk approached hundreds of Straw-coloured Fruitbats flew over and a Dwarf Crocodile entered the water and swam past us. The frogs chorus was on and off and impressively loud. As darkness fell we heard one then another Nkulengu Rail calling from deep in the forest. We did have one large bird fly

in, in the dark. It could have been Spot-breasted Ibis or White-crested Bittern but sadly it didn't stop in a tree by the pondside but carried on into the forest. As we drove back an emergency stop was necessitated as an African Wood-owl was found in a tree above the road, which stayed for all to admire.

Day 6 We gathered early in the carpark and almost immediately had a female African Shrike-flycatcher that we all got on to. After a short walk down to the river we quickly located two Cassin's Flycatchers, flycatching over the water. A Grey-headed Nigrita was found in a nearby tree and four Cassin's Spinetails flew overhead. The group then divided into two: one group stayed by the bridge and the other went into the forest. Those of us who went into the forest were accompanied by a man with a rifle in case we came across elephants or poachers. We heard Blue-headed Wood-dove but couldn't lure on in. However, we did track down a Finsch's Flycatcher-thrush and a Tambourine Dove. Paul's excellent hearing meant we stopped for a Rufous-winged Illadopsis, that showed now and then amongst the cover, until we were forced back to the path by bees. Next was another Illadopsis, this time Pale-breasted that I managed to glimpse briefly. We found another African Forest-flycatcher, heard Forest Robin and saw Yellow-whiskered Greenbul and three high-up Golden Greenbuls.

Back at the camp Craig showed us a superb photo he had taken of a White-bellied Kingfisher so after lunch we gathered at the site to see if it would come back. It did but it never sat still for long. We did get good views of Fraser's Sunbird, Western Bearded-greenbul and Chestnut-breasted Nigrita.

Sadly we now had to leave Ankasa and head east again. We made a few stops en route, once at a lake where we again found Orange Weavers and a couple of roadside stops for Shikra, Lesser Striped Swallow and Pied-winged Swallow. A stop for a comfort break provided interesting due to the toilets having clear glass doors!

We made a longer stop at a marshy area where there was a large colony of Village and Viellot's (Black) Weavers. Here we found a Wood Sandpiper, Spur-winged Lapwing, Yellow-crowned Gonolek and Long-tailed Cormorant. However, our target bird took a bit more work but we managed to get great views of both male and female Marsh Tchagra. Also here were Purple Heron, Pied Kingfisher, Grey Kestrel, Senegal Coucal and Western Plantain-eater. Finally I scoped a close male Copper Sunbird looking fantastic in the evening sun.

Day 7 As we prepared to board the bus a couple of Magpie Manakins were found. Some people had seen these around the hotel a few days earlier but they were new for me. Then we went to another part of Kakum National Park where we started with Lesser Striped Swallows flying around. We walked down a track and were soon off-track listening and looking for Brown Illadopsis. We heard and briefly saw this bird and heard Puvell's Illadopsis at the same site. A little further on we came across a (Little) Grey Greenbul and a nice male Green-headed Sunbird.

We stopped at a specific site Paul knows and, noting Simple Greenbul and Black-winged Bishop, scanned the area. Craig located our target bird: Blue-headed Coucal, which showed well, and there was another calling in the distance.

We then moved to another site and Paul played the call of White-spotted Flufftail. Almost immediately this tiny rail appeared and disappeared calling all the time. We stayed for a while and, eventually, it ran across the path next to us.

Back up on the main track we had both Yellow-browed and Olive-green Camaropteras, Pale Flycatcher and Tit-hylia. A Blue-spotted Wood-dove put in an appearance as did a Woodland Kingfisher. As we headed back to the bus we had good scope views of a perching Lesser Striped Swallow.

Our final stop of the day was a village with a school sponsored by Ashanti African Tours and visiting birders. We stopped for a photo with the children and then began an hour-long walk through the forest, up a couple of quite steep slopes, to an area where there are three wooden benches. Here we sat for just under two hours waiting for the big moment. The sweat bees were numerous and noisy but harmless. Paul then whispered that one was coming in from the right. We all watched and then there it was, a

White-necked Rockfowl (Yellow-headed Picarthartes). It was an amazing moment and we then spent the rest of the daylight watching and photographing this wonderful bird. This truly was a highlight of the trip and well worth the effort. We then left the bird alone and walked back through the forest to the village where we took up a collection for the village and said our farewells.

Day 8 Today we started at Opro Forest getting African Hobby, Black-and-white Manakin and two Orange-cheeked Waxbills. Two Brown-necked Parrots flew past and we found more Vielliot's Weavers, a Black-winged Oriole and a Northern Puffback.

We now had to drive up to Mole National Park. We did stop for two Rufous-crowned Rollers and a Beaudouin's Snake-eagle and closer to Mole we found six Grasshopper Buzzards, five Piapiacs, two Abyssinian Rollers, Wilson's Indigobird and a Western Kob (antelope). At the entrance to Mole Motel, as our hotel was named, we added two Bushbucks.

We had some time to ourselves, although some of us did wander about to see what was in the area. The hotel is on a high area and overlooks a waterhole and forest. Scanning the waterhole and area, and the nearby trees, I found Red-throated Bee-eaters, five Spur-winged Geese, nine Hadada Ibises and six Warthogs in the distance. I then turned around to see an adult Warthog about five metres from me wandering past the rooms! Later we were to see a whole family around the hotel.

We gathered at about 3.30 and drove to Mole airstrip (disused). Here we had Grasshopper Buzzard, Fork-tailed Drongo, three Rose-ringed Parakeets, Bush Petronia, heard Stone Partridge, saw four Yellow-billed Shrikes, and, finally, found both Long-tailed and Standard-winged Nightjars.

Day 9 We boarded the bus early (as usual), picked up an armed guard and drove down and into the national park. We saw African Harrier-hawk and had to make a fast stop when a male and female Abyssinian Ground-hornbill flew up from the grass next to the road and landed in a nearby tree.

We drove on a little way and then got out to start walking through the savannah woodland. It was nice to see Willow Warbler in its wintering quarters but the Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus was more diverting. Some people saw a Red-flanked Duiker. We stopped at various times on the walk getting Red-throated Bee-eaters, Bush Petronias, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Vinaceous Dove, two Yellow-fronted Canaries, Village Indigobird, Beautiful Sunbird, Northern Crombec and Pin-tailed Whydah. A crashing noise nearby indicated the presence of an elephant and we saw its large grey back half as we were encouraged to quickly move away.

We went the opposite direction to the elephant and where soon finding more birds: two White-breasted Cuckooshrikes, African Paradise-flycatcher, White-faced Whistling-ducks and two Green Wood-hoopoes. A nice Blue-breasted Kingfisher was next followed by three or four White-shouldered Black-tits. Birds kept coming with Grey Woodpecker followed by two female and one male Red-shouldered Cuckooshrikes and Yellow-breasted Apalis. A Grey-headed Bushshrike was found and then a Snowy-crowned Robin-chat. We saw some Double-spurred Francolins fly up from the path and then some of us had to make a quick walk back to the others when they found a Western Violet-backed Sunbird. Where the sunbird was also added Broad-billed Roller and a pair of Black-necked Weavers. Carrying on we found a Little Weaver, a Purple Starling and five Long-tailed Glossy Starlings, and four more Green Wood-hoopoes.

When then visited three waterholes. The first held a beautiful Malachite Kingfisher and two slightly-less-beautiful Swamp Flycatchers plus Bush Petronia, two Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus and three Red-throated Bee-eaters. The second waterhole added Wattled Lapwing plus Grey and Purple Herons and Hooded Vulture. The third waterhole held Cattle Egrets and at least one Little Egret, Hadada Ibis, seven Spur-winged Geese, Wattled Lapwings and Senegal Thick-knees, Hamerkop and Northern Black-flycatcher.

We also kept our eyes on the skies above us and had Shikra, and adult female and a juvenile Bateleur, seven White-backed Vultures with a single White-headed Vulture, and a Martial Eagle. We added

Squacco Heron and Western Yellow Wagtails on the nearby marshy areas, and, whilst watching from a raised platform, two African Elephants plus a Black-headed Heron. Pied Flycatchers were scattered about.

Heading back to the bus we found Woolly-necked Stork, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark and Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike plus Grey-headed Kingfisher, a male Bateleur and a Western Banded Snake-eagle. We also saw a Striped Ground-squirrel.

After lunch I went for a short walk around the hotel grounds and caught up with a bird some others had seen, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver. I also saw a troop of Patas Monkeys and a couple of Olive Baboons.

At 3.30 we set off in the bus, stopping for Stone Partridge and a pair of Four-banded Sandgrouse at the roadside, and drove to an area of open ground and short grasses. Paul quickly found a Spotted Thick-knee and then two Sun Larks. We tried for but had no joy with Forbes's Plover. There were a lot of flies here, small ones that were just annoying and large ones that bit but they weren't too much trouble.

On to another site where the flies were also present. Bug spray does not seem to bother them! We found Bruce's Green Pigeon and Fine-spotted Woodpecker. A stop near some water added two more Swamp Flycatchers, another Malachite Kingfisher, Grey Woodpecker, Broad-billed Roller, Violet Turaco and a Black-crowned Night-heron. We heard African Scops-owl.

On the drive back we saw no fewer than three Greyish Eagle-owls on the road!

Day 10 We drove back to Mole airstrip to see what we could find. We didn't have to walk far and saw three White-shouldered Black-tits, African Golden Oriole and Pygmy Sunbird. Three African Grey Hornbills were seen and Paul found us Red-winged Prinia and Brown-backed Woodpecker. Three Brown Babblers chuckled away in some bushes. We then located ourselves in a strategic position and lured in a very nice White-throated Francolin. This bird showed very well.

Moving a little way from the airstrip we found no less than seven Rufous Cisticolas, a Black-crowned Tchagra, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, two Northern Red Bishops plus seen-before Yellow-billed Shrike, Yellow-fronted Canary and Abyssinian Roller. Two Black Scimitarbills flew over and landed in a nearby tree and we found two Lizard Buzzards, a Striped Kingfisher, three Viellot's Barbets and a Scarlet-chested Sunbird.

Driving to Magnori Bridge we had three Stone Partridges cross the road in front of us. At the bridge we quickly got on to Wire-tailed Swallows and then found a Bearded Barbet. Then it was Blue-bellied Roller followed by around 10 Senegal Eremomolas looking very yellow until a male Pygmy Sunbird appeared and showed them what yellow really meant. A full-tailed male Togo Paradise-whydah flew over as did another Lizard Buzzard. In some nearby woods Willow Warblers were again found along with Singing Cisticola, two Black-bellied Firefinches and a Wahlberg's Eagle was overhead.

Our afternoon jaunt had us stop for Levillant's Cuckoo, Black-crowned Tchagra and, for some, White-fronted Black-chat. Our main goal was Forbes's Plover and tried a couple of potential sites. The first yielded three Sun Larks and a full-tailed male Exclamatory Paradise-whydah. At the second site the flies were out in force so whilst we waited in the bus Paul and Andrew (a co-leader with Paul and a butterfly expert), plus Jonathan with the rifle, went to look for the birds. We waited for about twenty minutes and then spotted Andrew beckoning. Time to risk the flies. We did a quick march for a kilometre or so, getting Lesser Blue-eared Starling and Greater Honeyguide en route, and found Paul in the middle of a large area of mostly low grass and burnt grass. He had located two Forbes's Plovers and we all admired these birds, and although they were quite flighty, they were seen well.

Finally for the day we stopped by the side of the road to listen for owls. An African Scops-owl was briefly seen and we thought that was it until Paul had us down another track and looking up into a tree

that held an African Scops-owl. After admiring this bird we walked to what felt like the next tree along and watched a fine Northern White-faced Owl. A great end to the day.

Day 11 Whilst eating breakfast we had White-shouldered Black-tit moving through the nearby trees. This morning we started with a walk around the hotel grounds. First we looked down towards the waterhole, which was a good move as we saw six Helmeted Guineafowl near the water. Moving our attention back to the trees around the hotel Paul found us a Familiar Chat, perched most accommodatingly on the open top of a bush. We had quite a few birds without really moving any further: Bush Petronia, Pied Flycatcher, Senegal Eremomela, African Paradise-flycatcher, a male Northern Puffback and a beautiful male Scarlet-chested Sunbird. Four Northern Black-flycatchers appeared as did three Grey-backed Camaropteras.

A few metres away we found a close Double-spurred Francolin and tried to lure in a White-crowned Robin-chat. I was lucky enough to be in the right place to see the bird but I am, not sure how the others did. We then got distracted by a shout of 'Batis' and we quickly headed in that direction. Sure enough we had male and female Senegal Batis, and in the same tree, a female Northern Puffback, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus, Yellow-fronted Canary and a very nice Pearl-spotted Owlet. Also in this area was found Red-winged Prinia.

Walking further around the grounds we had Barn, Wire-tailed and Red-chested Swallows, Red-billed Firefinches, an African Thrush, at least four Lavender Waxbills with some cordon-bleus and, finally, a Yellow-crowned Gonolek.

Our last site at Mole was again the airstrip and surrounding farmland. We tried for Brown-rumped Bunting but it didn't play ball and was a no-show.

So, now we got back in the bus and started to head further north. At one point the dust stopped the air-con working, and the bus heated up very quickly. Not a problem. A quick stop and a pressure hose wash and we were cool again.

Our next stop was a large marshy area that the main road very conveniently went past. We moved from side to side of the bridge getting about 60 Red-billed Queleas, two adult and one juvenile Chestnut-backed Sparrow-larks on one side and Dark-chanting Goshawk, African Jacana and Eurasian Marsh-harriers on the other. We also had our first Speckled Pigeon here and a Black-billed Wood-dove.

Our final port of call for the day was the Tongo Hills. This is grassland with rocky outcrops and has a few target birds. On arrival we soon saw our first Fox Kestrel, followed quickly by another and a few pairs of Gosling's Buntings. A different rocky area held about twenty Village Indigobirds, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus and at least two Black-rumped Waxbills plus a couple of African Silverbills. A key bird here is Rock-loving Cisticola and we had good views of this fast-moving species. It was surprisingly rufous. Beware the local children. They are friendly but eyed anything in pockets and did try to grab some things. Mainly they were after empty bottles, which we gave to them.

Day 12 Today we were going north again, close to the border with Burkina Faso. I believe we were within 500m of the border at one point. Our goal was a river near the border but we had a little drive and some birding to do on the way.

Our first stop was in a scrubby dry habitat where we quickly picked up a perched Red-necked Falcon and perched Grey Kestrel. Six Yellow-billed Shrikes were seen and we had distant views of two Purple Starlings and two Northern Carmine Bee-eaters. A third bee-eater flew over our heads. Three more perched raptors turned out to be Dark Chanting-goshawk, Brown Snake-eagle and Lizard Buzzard. We found three Bruce's Green-pigeons and our first Northern Red-billed Hornbills.

Another stop was by a tree containing large White-billed Buffalo-weavers and we saw three birds around the nests. Hirundines in this area comprised Red-rumped (West African) Swallow, Red-chested Swallow and Grey-rumped Swallow.

We drove until we reached a small marshy area and walked to the river. It wasn't long before we were admiring two, then four, and eventually a total of seven, Egyptian Plovers. Also here were Common Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, two Wattled Lapwings and four Spur-winged Lapwings. Three Speckled Pigeons were located and two Mourning Collared-doves came to the river to drink, with more being heard calling from the nearby trees. A Striated Heron disappeared quickly into cover but two Little Egrets stayed in the open. After the Egyptian Plovers had been photographed we walked back to the bus, seeing Long-tailed Glossy Starlings, 24 Piapiacs, White-faced Whistling-duck, Grey-headed Kingfisher and a Rufous-crowned Roller.

Our next stop was Tono Dam. We drove along the dam wall and parked up in another dry scrubby area. We walked this area getting an African Harrier-hawk being mobbed by Pied Crows, a single Sun Lark, and a flock comprising about 12 Bronze Manakins and three Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus. A perched Dark Chanting-goshawk was found and a Black-crowned Tchagra appeared in a nearby small tree. Continuing our walk around we found two Senegal Eremomelas, a Tawny-flanked Prinia and three Northern Red-billed Hornbills. Paul located three Yellow Penduline-tits and there was a nearby Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird. A tree seemed to be a place for Bruce's Green-pigeon and the maximum count noted was 51 birds. Finally, as we drove back and the sun was setting we saw at least 12 Broad-billed Rollers flying above the dam.

Day 13 Today was mostly a travel day as we had to get back down south to Atewa. The journey had hardly started when Paul shouted 'Chestnut-bellied Starling' and Enim slammed on the brakes. We piled out of the bus and walked a little way back and relocated the birds, one of which was seen carrying nesting material.

We stopped again at the marshy site we stopped at on Day 11. Here we saw Malachite Kingfisher, Abyssinian Roller, four Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, Squacco and Striated Herons, three Eurasian Marsh-harriers and African Jacanas. New birds for the trip were a nice Woodchat Shrike, a Black Crake, that quickly disappeared but later reappeared so all could see it, a Black-headed Weaver and three Yellow-crowned Bishops. We again saw Spur-winged Goose, Speckled Pigeon, Red-billed Firefinch and great scope views of Purple Starling.

Most of the birds I noted on the drive down were raptors: Grasshopper Buzzard, Lizard Buzzard, Red-necked Buzzard, Lanner Falcon. As we worked our way through the traffic of Kumasi we saw 100s of Straw-coloured Fruitbats flying out to feed.

Day 14 Our first site today was Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary. However, as we drove to it I noticed a loose flock of about 50 birds flying over the bus and realised they were all African Pied Hornbills!

At Bobiri we started with a perched pair (male and female) of Red-thighed Sparrowhawks, and they sat there for some time. Chestnut-capped Flycatchers were in green tangles on trees and Paul tried for African Piculet. The bird duly appeared and dived into cover. However, Thomas P. got his scope on it, which was an extraordinary feat, so we could see it sitting there preening.

We continued to walk down the track getting four Collared Sunbirds and a catch-up for some, four Red-billed Helmetshrikes. Also with the helmetshrikes was Velvet-mantled Drongo and Yellow-mantled Weaver.

Paul, and all of us, put in a lot of effort trying to locate and coax in Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill. We heard them and they replied to the tape and we searched many nearby trees. After about half an hour we finally had them fly in, three in total, and managed to seem them quite well if briefly. We also saw a nice Red-headed Malimbe as we hunted for the hornbills.

A Little Grey Flycatcher was next, which posed well for photographers, followed by Ashy Flycatcher, and a Finsch's Flycatcher-thrush. We found a pair of Crested Malimbés building a nest and saw Olive Sunbird and Hairy-breasted Barbet.

A little further on Paul found a Black-throated Coucal on the path, with another close behind it. These birds quickly dived for cover below a bush holding a Chestnut-breasted Nigrita.

Blue Cuckooshrike was another catch-up bird for some and we found some sunbirds: Buff-throated, Johanna's and Blue-throated Brown.

The afternoon was spent at Atewa farmlands, at least that's what Paul called them. It was the area of land that runs alongside the Atewa hill range. The actual hills were to be left for tomorrow.

We started with Klaas's Cuckoo and Slender-billed Greenbul. Paul tried for Double-toothed Barbet and I was lucky enough to spot some movement and get my scope on it for all to see. We walked along the track seeing Pin-tailed Whydah, Bar-breasted Firefinch, Little Greenbul and Grosbeak Weaver. In a more open area we had Viellot's (Black) Weaver, Northern Fiscal, a fly-past by two Dideric Cuckoos, and heard an African Emerald Cuckoo. The African Emerald as tracked down and it's superb colouring admired through scopes. A real wow bird. A dead tree was the nest site for Naked-faced Barbet and a few were seen, and they were then joined, although they didn't seem to happy about it, by an adult and two juvenile Narrow-tailed Starlings. A male Buff-throated Sunbird was found followed by a Blue Malkoha (Yellowbill) and a Western Nicator. Three Square-tailed Saw-wings flew past and two Plain-backed Pipits were found feeding nearby.

We walked a little further into a more-bushy area and saw a nice male Superb Sunbird and a couple of African Firefinches. Paul said he could hear Red-rumped Tinkerbird but said we'd all seen that. I pointed out that I hadn't so he played the call. The bird duly appeared, and after a few seconds viewing it's front it turned around and showed us it's red rump. Heading back to the bus we saw about 40 White-throated Bee-eaters.

Day 15 Today was our last day in Ghana and we were to walk up a fairly gentle slope in the Atewa range. The heat and humidity made the gentle walk quite tough but it was worth it. The goal was to get to the top of the hill so we didn't stop for birds we heard but had already seen: Melancholy Woodpecker and Puvel's Illadopsis, although we did see a Western Black-headed Oriole. Our first stop was when Paul heard a good cuckoo. He disappeared into the forest and soon called us in. The bird was high up but viewable from certain angles. It was a fine Yellow-throated Cuckoo and showed its yellow throat. Next stop was for Grey-throated Tit-flycatcher, an elusive species that took some getting on.

Onward we walked stopping only for three beautiful Black Bee-eaters until we head almost reached the top of the hill. We quickly found our target bird: Blue-moustached Bee-eater and saw four whilst we were up here – another heavily photographed bird. We also had a Wood Warbler here and a Sharpe's Apalis.

On the walk down we came across Icterine Greenbul, Speckled Tinkerbird, West African Wattle-eye, Fraser's Sunbird, Sabine's Puffback and a juvenile Maxwell's Black Weaver.

And then we were done. We had only the drive back to Accra airport and the final log to do. It had been an excellent trip with a great group of people, great birds, plus many animals, butterflies and dragonflies. The organisation of Birdfinders and Ashanti African Tours was impeccable and Paul Mensah was simply brilliant. How he saw or heard some of those birds I will never know but without him we would have been lost. I also owe Vaughan a few lifers as he found some serious goodies during the trip.