

Ethiopia

[27th Oct – 14th Nov 2015]



I booked a birding tour to Ethiopia with **Sunbird** as it appeared to be the most comprehensive and best value trip at £3700 and I was not disappointed. There were 12 participants from USA, Canada, Belgium, Scotland, England and Wales led very ably by Paul French. Over the next 18 days we stayed at several locations all of high quality for Africa as we travelled the Rift Valley, Southern Plains, Bale mountains, Northern Lowlands and Northern Highlands. With excellent food at all hotels and lodges we were well looked after. Our local guide Merid Gabremichael had a vast amount of expertise on Ethiopian birds and all the local sites and people built up through years of experience. We travelled by a combination of Bus and 4x4 vehicles evenly split and had no travel problems except for 1 puncture that took less than 15mins to change by our very competent 4x4 drivers.

27th Oct 2015

Most of us flew from London Heathrow, departing at 0630hrs for Frankfurt, Germany, where we caught a connecting flight to Bole Airport, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia stopping briefly at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. We arrived after dark at 2130hrs [3hrs ahead of GMT] at Bole and transferred to a local hotel in Addis Ababa [10mins]. The **Jupiter Hotel** was of a high standard and the rooms and evening meal were of an equally high standard. After the meal we all went to bed early ready for tomorrow's birding onslaught. The USA, Canadian, Belgium and Scottish participants had arrived earlier in the day and had already retired to bed.

28th Oct 2015

Arose well before dawn as is custom on the first full day of a birding holiday and had a hearty breakfast in time for dawn and a brief walk around the hotel grounds and nearby lanes before departing on our journey to the Rift Valley. First bird seen around the hotel was **Dusky Turtle Dove** (✓) followed quickly by **Yellow-billed Kite** (✓), **Red-eyed Dove** (✓), **Speckled Pigeon** (✓), Common Bulbul, **Brown Parisoma** (✓), **Beautiful Sunbird** (✓), **Pied Crow** (✓) and **Village Indigobird** (✓). We set off from the hotel at 0700hrs. On the way we briefly stopped at a river bridge just outside Addis Ababa to observe a pair of **African Black Duck** (✓) and arrived at our first proper birding stop at Lake Cheleklaka in Debra Zeit at 0810hrs. Although water levels were down due to drought, the area was teeming with birds and over the next two hours we built up an impressive list of species with many birds being a tick for me and included 5 Squacco Heron, 5 Cattle Egret, 2 Little Egret, 1 Great Egret, 10 **Hamerkop** (✓), 2 **Yellow-billed Stork** (✓), 300 **Maribou Stork** (✓), 100 **Sacred Ibis** (✓), 1 **African Spoonbill** (✓), 1 **Fulvous Whistling Duck** (✓), 100 **White-faced Whistling Duck** (✓), 50 Egyptian Goose, 6 **Spur-winged Goose** (✓), 4 **Knob-billed Duck** (✓), 5 **Yellow-billed Duck** (✓), 8 **Red-billed Duck** (✓), 20 **Hottentot Teal** (✓), 20 Garganey, 50 Shoveler, 2 **Southern Pochard** (✓), 2 Ferruginous Duck, 2 **Red-knobbed Coot** (✓) and 2 **Black-crowned Crane** (✓). Waders were also well represented on the muddier parts of the shore in 10 Black-winged Stilt, 2 Avocet, 4 Little-ringed Plover, 50 Ruff, 2 Marsh Sandpiper, 1 Greenshank, 1 Redshank, 2 Green Sandpiper, 15 Wood Sandpiper, 1 Common Sandpiper and 20 Collared Pratincole although I missed the latter while watching something else. The surrounding area of fields and trees were also rich in birdlife and included 2 **African Fish Eagle** (✓), 30 **Hooded Vulture** (✓), 1 **Lappet-faced Vulture** (✓), 10 **White-backed Vulture** (✓), 2 Marsh Harrier, 1 **Gabar Goshawk** (✓), 1 **Dark Chanting Goshawk** (✓), 1 Booted Eagle, 3 White-winged Tern, 5 **African Mourning Dove** (✓), 20 **Ring-necked Dove** (✓), 5 **Laughing Dove** (✓), 2 Red-eyed Dove, 20 Speckled Pigeon, 1 **Horus Swift** (✓), 1 **Woodland Kingfisher** (✓), 2 **Malachite Kingfisher** (✓), 2 **Northern Carmine Bee-eater** (✓), 4 Hoopoe, 50 **Plain Martin** (✓), 30 Barn Swallow, 15 Yellow Wagtail of various races, 8 Common Bulbul, 20 Isabelline Wheatear, 2 Sedge Warbler, 1 **Black-headed Batis** (✓), 2 **Beautiful Sunbird** (✓), 5 **Fan-tailed Raven** (✓), 10 **Ruppell's Starling** (✓), 10 **Swainson's Sparrow** (✓), 30 **Ruppell's Weaver** (✓), 4 **Red-cheeked Cordon Bleu** (✓), **Bronze Mannikin** (✓), 2 Village Indigobird and 1 **Brown-rumped Seed-eater**(✓).

After that manic introduction to Ethiopian birding we departed at 1010hrs and continued on our journey down the Rift Valley stopping at **Haile Resort Ziway, Lake Ziway, Ziway** for lunch at 1230hrs, which was on the shore of the lake itself. The food here was excellent and a must for any travelling birder as the gardens of the hotel hold many interesting species and the back gate leads on to an area of the lakeshore where the public don't generally wander and we still had great views over the lake and marshes itself. Within the resort grounds birds found included **Speckled Mousebird (✓)**, 4 Hoopoe, 10 Common Bulbul, **Tawny-flanked Prinia (✓)**, **Grey-backed Camaroptera (✓)**, **Scarlet-chested Sunbird (✓)**, Beautiful Sunbird, Isabelline Shrike, 2 **Fork-tailed Drongo (✓)**, 4 **Cape Rook (✓)**, 10 **Greater Blue-eared Starling (✓)**, 10 **White-browed Sparrow Weaver (✓)**, 20 Ruppell's Weaver, 6 Red-cheeked Cordon Bleu and 2 Village Indigobird.

With lunch finished we went through the back gate and onto a raised path that had a small bird packed lake on the right and an equally bird filled grass and marshland on the left, this area turned out to be richer in birdlife than Lake Cheleklaka [if that was possible]. Bird species new and old came thick and fast as the following list shows. 2 Little Grebe, 4 **Long-tailed Cormorant (✓)**, 10 Great [White-breasted] Cormorant, 3 **African Darter (✓)**, 100 White Pelican, 5 Squacco Heron, 10 Cattle Egret, 2 **Black Heron (✓)**, 6 Little Egret, 30 Hamerkop, 2 Yellow-billed Stork, 2 Great Egret, 1 Grey Heron, 1000 Maribou Stork, 6 Glossy Ibis, 10 **Hadada Ibis (✓)**, 50 Sacred Ibis, 15 African Spoonbill, 12 **Lesser Flamingo (✓)**, 40 Greater Flamingo, 8 Fulvous Whistling Duck, 100 White-faced Whistling Duck, 80 Egyptian Goose, 4 Spur-winged Goose, 10 Knob-billed Duck, 1 Eurasian Teal, 6 Yellow-billed Duck, 10 Northern Pintail, 20 Hottentot Teal, 10 Red-billed Duck, 100 Garganey, 100 Shoveler, 200 Yellow-billed Kite, 10 African Fish Eagle, 80 Hooded Vulture, 30 **Ruppell's Vulture (✓)**, 15 **White-headed Vulture (✓)**, 15 White-backed Vulture, 2 Marsh Harrier, 3 Dark-chanting Goshawk, 1 **Tawny Eagle (✓)**, 1 Steppe Eagle, 2 Booted Eagle, 1 **Long-crested Eagle (✓)**, 10 Common Moorhen, 2 Red-knobbed Coot, 40 **African Jacana (✓)**, 30 Black-winged Stilt, 30 Pied Avocet, 2 Little Ringed Plover, 6 Ringed Plover, 1 **Kittlitz's Plover (✓)**, 1 **Three-banded Plover (✓)**, 15 Spur-winged Plover, 1 Little Stint, 3 Temminck's Stint, 100 Ruff, 6 Black-tailed Godwit, 8 Marsh Sandpiper, 4 Greenshank, 2 Green Sandpiper, 20 Wood Sandpiper, 3 Common Sandpiper, 1 **Grey-headed Gull (✓)**, 10 White-winged Tern, 2 Namaqua Dove, all the usual pigeon and doves, 1 **Grey-headed Kingfisher (✓)**, 2 Woodland Kingfisher, 3 Malachite Kingfisher, 2 Pied Kingfisher, 3 **Little Bee-eater (✓)**, 2 **Blue-breasted Bee-eater (✓)**, 4 Northern Carmine Bee-eater, 6 Eurasian Bee-eater, 4 Hoopoe, 60 Plain Martin, 30 Barn Swallow, 20 Yellow Wagtail, 1 Pied Wheatear, 30 Isabelline Wheatear, 2 **Grey-backed Fiscal (✓)**, 20 Ruppell's Starling, 20 Ruppell's Weaver and 6 Red-cheeked Cordon Bleu. We finally drew ourselves away from Lake Ziway at 1530hrs and continued on our journey down the Rift Valley to our overnight stay at Simbo Lodge, Lake Langano.

We arrived at Simbo Lodge at 1700hrs and were greeted at the entrance by 2 **Groundscraper Thrush (✓)**. After checking in to our well-built chalets we still had time for a look around the grounds and woods just inland. This turned out to be a good idea as many new birds were seen. The list is as follows leaving out birds already seen today. 1 **Crested Francolin (✓)**, 2 **White-bellied Goaway Bird (✓)**, 1 **Eastern Grey Plantain Eater (✓)** [seen by me only], 1 **Verreaux's Eagle Owl (✓)** [found by lodge security guards], 8 **Slender-tailed Nightjar (✓)**, 3 **Freckled Nightjar (✓)**, 2 **Blue-naped Mousebird (✓)**, 2 Speckled Mousebird, 6 **Mocking Cliff Chat (✓)**, 1 **White-winged Cliff Chat (✓)**, 1 **African Thrush (✓)**, 1 **Red-faced Crombec (✓)**, 1 Grey-backed Camaroptera, 1 **Northern Black Flycatcher (✓)**, 2 **African Paradise Flycatcher (✓)**, 1 **Rufous Chatterer (✓)**, 2 **Abyssinian White-eye (✓)**, 1 **Common Fiscal (✓)**, 10 **Superb Starling (✓)** and 2 **African Citril (✓)**.

After another mad hour's birding we then retired for evening-meal which was again top notch and then retired early to bed ready for another days birding in Ethiopia. I finished the day with 87 new birds out of a total of 125+ species, not a bad start.

29th Oct 2015

I was again up and out 1hr before dawn at 0500hrs to listen for Owls and Nightjars and then a walk again around the scrub and woods. As most of the commoner species have been seen, I won't mention them again without reason. We managed to see Slender-tailed Nightjar and here Freckled Nightjar But not as good as yesterday's views. **African Scops Owl (✓)** was heard outside my chalet for most of the night. After the dawn chorus lots of species became evident in the growing light in the scrub, woods and skies and included – 2 African Fish Eagle, 1 Dark-chanting Goshawk, 1 Eleonora's Falcon, 1 **Crested Francolin (✓)**, 1 **Bruce's Green Pigeon (✓)**, 1 **African Orange-bellied Parrot (✓)**, 10 **Black-winged Lovebird (✓)**, 1 **Bare-faced Goaway Bird (✓)**, 2 White-bellied Goaway Bird, 2 **Greyish Eagle Owl (✓)** [Found by security guards], 1 Verreaux's Eagle Owl [Found by locals], 1 **Striped Kingfisher (✓)**, 2 **Northern Red-billed Hornbill (✓)**, 1 **Red-fronted Barbet (✓)**, 4 **Red-throated Wryneck (✓)**, 1 **Bearded Woodpecker (✓)**, 1 Rock Martin, Common Redstart [*ssp. – samamiscus*], 1 **Abyssinian Black Wheatear (✓)**, 3 **Little Rock Thrush (✓)**, 3 Chiffchaff, 1 Lesser Whitethroat, 8 **White-rumped Babbler (✓)**, 2 **Northern White-crowned Shrike (✓)** and finally 2 **Slate-coloured Boubou (✓)**.

After another hearty breakfast we left this magical place [37 ticks] on our continuing journey into the heart of the Rift Valley. We made the short journey [in fact across the main road 2 miles away] to Lake Abiata Woods National Reserve for a quick hour's walk and arrived at 0800hrs. We were hoping to pick up a few new species before continuing to Awassa. As things turned out we acquired a few good species in **White-browed Coucal (✓)**, 2 **Von Der Decken' Hornbill (✓)**, 1 **Lesser Honeyguide (✓)**, 1 **Cardinal Woodpecker (✓)**, Rufous Scrub-Robin, 1 Black-eared Wheatear, 2 **Rattling Cisticola (✓)**, 1 **African Grey Flycatcher (✓)**, 3 **White-winged Black Tit (✓)** and 1 **Black-cheeked Waxbill (✓)**. The heat had built up by 1000hrs to a stifling 35c, so we continued on to Awassa.

On our way we made a brief stop on the roadside overlooking some wheat fields 10kms north of **Shashemene** to observe a pair of **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill (✓)** and here we also picked up our first **Abyssinian Roller (✓)**, **Lilac-throated Roller (✓)** and also **15 Red-winged Starling (✓)**.

We arrived at United Africa Hotel, Lake Awassa and was presently surprised to see the very large and wooded grounds awaiting us. After checking in to another very good room we had a great lunch and after a brief 15min rain shower we were out in the gardens by 1430hrs. A good selection of birds were seen which meant our trip list grew even larger on only our second day. Birds seen within the grounds are as follows – 2 Squacco Heron, 6 Cattle Egret, 100 Maribou Stork, 10 Egyptian Goose, 30 Yellow-billed Kite, 2 African Fish-eagle, 50 Hooded Vulture, 5 species of pigeon, 2 White-bellied Goaway Bird, 8 Blue naped Mousebird, 2 Speckled Mousebird, 2 Woodland Kingfisher, 3 Hoopoe, 3 Red-billed Hornbill, 2 **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill (✓)**, 2 **Nubian Woodpecker (✓)**, 1 **Grey-headed Woodpecker (✓)**, 4 Yellow Wagtail, 1 **Yellow-bellied Eremomela (✓)**, 3 **Red-faced Crombec (✓)** 1 **Red-faced Cisticola (✓)**, 3 Rattling Cisticola, 3 **Buff-bellied Warbler (✓)**, 1 Northern Black Flycatcher, 6 Spotted Flycatcher, 1 Beautiful Sunbird, 2 Abyssinian White-eye, 2 Fork-tailed Drongo, 6 **Thick-billed Raven (✓)**, 10 Cape Rook, 20 Greater Blue-eared Starling, 30 Ruppell's Starling, 50 Superb Starling, 20 Swainson's Sparrow, 6 **White-headed Buffalo Weaver (✓)**, 30 Ruppell's Weaver, 15 **Red-billed Firefinch (✓)**, 4 Bronze Mannikin, 1 **Pin-tailed Whydah (✓)** and 4 Village Indigobird.

Our last hour of sunlight was spent on a short [5min] drive to Awassa Fish Market and surrounding grounds. A large number of already seen wildfowl and waders were present but new birds for the trip seen included **Augur Buzzard (✓)**, 2 Common Kestrel, 10 Sand Martin, 1 Red-rumped Swallow, 1 Willow Warbler, 2 Common Whitethroat, 1 **Spotted Creeper (✓)** [couldn't find this species within the hotel grounds], 1 Red-backed Shrike, 1 Eurasian Golden Oriole and 5 **Violet-backed Starling (✓)**.

At the end of day two we had easily passed 200+ species for the trip and I had gained another 43 new species. After another fabulous evening meal and a few drinks we all retired early to bed for the next day's birding.

30th Oct 2015

We were all up and out at 0600hrs for our pre-breakfast walk outside the grounds of the hotel along the path [turn right as you leave through the back gate] between the lake and some very good scrub and field habitat, this turned out to be a very productive 2 hrs. Birds seen included 10 Long-tailed Cormorant, 1 African Darter, 1 Squacco Heron, 6 Little Egret, 1 Great Egret, 4 Purple Heron, 10 Hamerkop, 200 Maribou Stork, 1 Glossy Ibis, 3 Hadada Ibis, 5 Scared Ibis, 40 White-faced Whistling Duck, 4 **White-backed Duck (✓)**, 10 Egyptian Goose, 20 **African Pygmy Goose (✓)**, 6 African Fish Eagle, 50 Hooded Vulture, 15 **Black Crake (✓)**, 2 **Allen's Gallinule (✓)**, 1 Purple Swamphen, 4 Red-knobbed Coot, 50 African Jacana, 2 Wood Sandpiper, 1 Green Sandpiper, 2 **Grey-headed Gull (✓)**, 4 White-winged Tern, 1 Feral Pigeon, 2 Black-winged Lovebird, 6 **Blue-headed Coucal (✓)**, 1 Grey-headed Kingfisher, 1 Woodland Kingfisher, 1 **African Pygmy Kingfisher (✓)**, 30 Malachite Kingfisher, 20 Pied Kingfisher, 2 Blue-breasted Bee-eater, 1 Lilac-throated Roller, 1 Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, 2 Yellow Wagtail, 2 **Ruppell's Robin Chat (✓)**, 4 Eurasian Reed Warbler [I think], 1 **Lesser Swamp Warbler (✓)**, 3 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, 1 Lesser Whitethroat, 2 **Dark-capped Yellow Warbler (✓)**, 3 Buff-bellied Warbler, 1 **African Dusky Flycatcher (✓)**, 2 **Brown-throated Wattle-eye (✓)**, 2 White-rumped Babbler, 1 **Tacaze Sunbird (✓)**, 2 Beautiful Sunbird, 2 Abyssinian White-eye, 1 Grey-backed Fiscal, 4 Thick-billed Raven, 10 **Baglafaecht Weaver (✓)**, 6 **Spectacled Weaver (✓)**, 40 **Grosbeak Weaver (✓)**, 15 **Northern Red Bishop (✓)**, 4 **Common Waxbill (✓)**, 4 Red-billed Firefinch, 2 **Cut-throat Finch (✓)**, 10 Brown-rumped Seed-eater and 15 **Yellow-crowned Canary (✓)**.

This was our first big travel day. So after another solid breakfast we bid farewell to **United Africa Hotel, Awassa** with a big thumbs up and wish we could have stayed longer. We left at 0830hrs and began our journey up to the Bale Mountains via **Sashemene** towards **Goba**. We made a number of birding stops on the way as we climbed to a greater and greater altitude. First stop was at a small ravine at 7,000 feet beside the main road and duly ticked off 6 **Red-chested Swallow (✓)**. Then further up at 9000 feet we stopped to watch a **Cape Eagle Owl (✓)** at its roost found as always by the kids from a local village for a small payment, the air was now getting thin and at first I had trouble walking the 150 yards to the bird having yet to acclimatize. We had a packed Lunch at **Dinsho** with 3 Booted Eagle overhead before carrying on to the Bale Mountain Reserve where a guide showed us some of the more interesting birds of the park in roosting **African Wood Owl (✓)**, **Abyssinian Long-eared Owl (✓)**, 2 **Montane Nightjar (✓)**, 1 **Abyssinian Catbird (✓)**, 2 **White-backed Black Tit (✓)** 2 **Black-headed Siskin (✓)**. Our final stop was at a small roadside lake at 10,000 feet and by now I had acclimatized to the altitude and had no further problems, here we saw 10 Yellow-billed Duck, 15 **Blue-winged Goose (✓)**, 1 Egyptian Vulture, 1 Pallid Harrier, 1 Eurasian Sparrowhawk, 4 Augur Buzzard, 5 **Rouget's Rail (✓)**, 30 **White-collared Pigeon (✓)**, 10 Dusky Turtle Dove, 1 Red-throated Pipit, 1 **African Stonechat (✓)**, 4 **Moorland Chat (✓)**, 2 **Red-breasted Wheatear (✓)**, 1 **Montane White-eye (✓)**, 20 Black-headed Siskin. We also saw 4 Red-billed Chough as we passed the highest point of the pass at 11,000 feet. We arrived at **Goba** and the **Wabe Shabelle Hotel** after dark and to a brief power cut but otherwise the hotel was Ok in my opinion, even though it had had a lot of bad press. The meals and rooms were of a good standard. Off to bed early again ready for 14,000 feet tomorrow. Another 35 ticks for me as the trip list soared past 250+ species.

31st Oct 2015

After another good breakfast we set off for the Bale Plateau at 0700hrs. As we wound up the roads to greater heights the mist came down and visibility was down to 10 feet so we couldn't appreciate the heights at which we were at. But Merid assured us that the sun would burn it away by 0900hrs and we would have a clear day. Bang on 0900hrs the mist cleared up to reveal a clear warm [for the mountains anyway] day. We were able to see the vastness of this plateau as we travelled up and down it and we got all the highland specialties, most at close range. First I have to mention the incredible close views of the Ethiopian wolf, we saw 9 of this endangered species, with one right next to the bus and was able to take some stunning photos. Highland birds seen included 75 **Wattled Ibis** (✓), 25 Blue-winged Goose, 4 Ruddy Shelduck, 2 Yellow-billed Duck, 6 Shoveler [a surprise here], 1 **Lammergeier** (✓), 1 Ruppell's Vulture, 30 Augur Buzzard, 20 Steppe Eagle, 2 Lanner, 1 Peregrine, 7 **Moorland Francolin** (✓), 15 **Chestnut-naped Francolin** (✓), 6 Rouget's Rail, 1 **Wattled Crane** (✓), 30 **Spot-breasted Plover** (✓), 1 snipe species not identified with certainty, 10 White-collared Pigeon, 15 Thekla Lark, 10 Red-throated Pipit, 1 **Abyssinian Longclaw** (✓), 30 Moorland Chat and 50 Black-headed Siskin.

Having had lunch at 14000 feet and one of the group fainting due to lack of oxygen we returned down to the woods at 10,000 feet for a walk around and to pick up some more species in 1 **Verreaux's Eagle** (✓), 1 **Ayres's Hawk Eagle** (✓), 20 Black-winged Lovebird, 1 **White-cheeked Turaco** (✓), 2 **Abyssinian Woodpecker** (✓), 2 Grey Wagtail, 3 **Dark-capped Bulbul** (✓), 3 **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** (✓), 4 **Mountain Thrush** (✓), 1 **Bale Parisoma** (✓), 4 **Ethiopian Cisticola** (✓), 2 **Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher** (✓), 5 Abyssinian Catbird, 6 Tacazze Sunbird, 1 Beautiful Sunbird, 8 Thick-billed Raven, 6 Red-billed Chough, **100 Slender-billed Starling** (✓), 5 African Citril, **15 Streaky Seed-eater** (✓), 2 Brown-rumped Seed-eater and 10 Yellow-fronted Canary.

We returned to the hotel just as it got dark and in time for the 1800hrs power cut, which we found out later is when the mains electricity goes off and the generator electricity comes on. A very satisfying evening meal and drinks and I even watched TV for a couple of hours while lying in bed and dosed off about 2300hrs. 19 New species for me today taking our trip list to just short of 300.

1st Nov 2015

Today we switched to 4x4 vehicles for our longest journey back over the Bale plateau down to the Harena Forest and on to Negelle some 300km away on non-Tarmac roads for the most part. However we stopped after 10kms to view a pair of **Yellow-fronted Parrots** (✓) at a nest site next to the road which our guide Merid had spotted. After this we travelled over the Bale Plateau seeing the same birds as yesterday and down very quickly to 5000 feet to the oxygen rich Harena forest. We made two stops here [one for lunch] and new birds in 1 Black Stork, 1 **African Goshawk** (✓), 35 **Black Saw-wing** (✓), 1 **Green-backed Eremomela** (✓) [seen only by me], 1 **Singing Cisticola** (✓), 2 **Yellow-breasted Apalis** (✓), 2 **African Hill Babbler** (✓), 2 **Variable Sunbird** (✓), 1 **Northern Puffback** (✓), 1 **Ethiopian Boubou** (✓), 3 **Abyssinian Crimsonwing** (✓), 6 **Yellow-bellied Waxbill** (✓), 4 **Black and White Mannikin** (✓) and 6 Pin-tailed Whydah including two resplendent males.

We continued on after this on an endless length of dirt road, after a while the drivers needed a rest so we stopped at the side of the road and picked up some more ticks while the drivers were resting for 20mins. These were 18 **White-crested Helmet-Shrike** (✓), 11 **Red-headed Weaver** (✓) and **Vitelline Masked Weaver** (✓), we continued onwards passing the 200km mark before we stopped for the prize of the trip. And it wasn't too long before I spotted a pair **Prince Ruspoli's Turaco** (✓) hiding in the back of a dense tree. It wasn't great views but after a couple of minutes they flew to another tree and revealed themselves to all the party for a prolonged period. Now all we had to do was drive another 100kms to our hotel in Negelle. Thankfully 60kms of this was on a fast tarmac road and we arrived just after dark at the recently refurbished **Meareg Hotel**. This was another very good hotel, but we did have to go to a local restaurant for evening meal as the hotel's

restaurant was now a Police Station. The local restaurant served some of the tastiest food of the tour and was only 2mins drive from the hotel. As of yet we had had no trouble with insects and mosquitos or even been bothered by hordes of children that everyone who had been before us had warned about. Even though it was mainly a travel day I still manged 17 ticks.

2nd Nov 2015

As we were having breakfast in the field today we were able to get out at 0530hrs to be at the Liben Plains at dawn. First birds spotted were 2 **Bristle-crowned Starling (✓)** on the hotel balconies. Just as dawn broke we parked up on the Libel Plains and with the help of the local people we were able to watch the mythical **Sidamo [Liben] Lark (✓)** at very close range. Other birds seen after the pressure was off included 2 **Black-chested Snake Eagle (✓)**, 80 Lesser Kestrel, 1 Eurasian Hobby, 20 **Yellow-necked Spurfowl (✓)**, 2 **Kori Bustard (✓)** with the male displaying at times, 30 **Somali Short-toed Lark (✓)**, 4 **Ethiopian Swallow (✓)**, 10 **Plain-backed Pipit (✓)**, 3 **Boran Cisticola (✓)** and 36 **White-crowned Starling (✓)**.

From here we drove further east to an area of Acacia wood and here as well as along the road we built up quite an impressive list of birds such as 1 Striped Kingfisher, 4 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, 2 **Black-billed Wood-Hoopoe (✓)**, 2 Hoopoe, 4 Red-billed Hornbill, 1 **Greater Honeyguide (✓)**, 1 Cardinal Woodpecker, 3 **White-tailed Swallow (✓)**, which were a little further north than they should be, 1 Common Rock Thrush, 1 Yellow-bellied Eremomela, 1 **Northern Crombec (✓)**, 20 Willow Warbler, 1 Yellow-breasted Apalis, 2 **Northern Grey Tit (✓)**, 1 **Marico Sunbird (✓)**, 1 **Shining Sunbird (✓)**, 1 Isabelline Shrike, 4 Slate-coloured Boubou, 4 **Black-headed Oriole (✓)**, 2 **Yellow-spotted Pretonia (✓)**, 20 **Grey-capped Social Weaver (✓)**, 3 Red-headed Weaver, 6 **Reichenow's Seedeater (✓)**, 1 Streaky Seedeater and 1 **Salvadori's Seedeater (✓)**.

We then had a picnic lunch in the field and started our way back [we were about 40km from Negelle]. Our next planned stop was a seasonal Lake on the Liben Plains, there must have been good rains in the area as the lake basin was full and packed with common waders and herons. Amongst these there were a number of new or good birds in 1 Squacco Heron, 100 Cattle Egret, 20 **Black-headed Heron (✓)**, 40 **Abdim's Stork (✓)**, 35 White Stork, 150 Scared Ibis, 1 African Spoonbill, 2 Knob-billed Duck, 5 African White-backed Vulture, 1 Ruppell's Vulture, 2 Lappet-faced Vulture, 2 Black-chested Snake-Eagle, 1 Montagu's Harrier, 1 Pallid Harrier, 4 Red-knobbed Coot, 82 Collared Pratincole, 18 Black-winged Pratincole, 5 **Black-winged Plover (✓)**, 100 **Crowned Plover (✓)**, 2 Little Stint, 50 White-winged Tern, 1 Grey-headed Kingfisher and 4 Lilac-throated Roller.

Time was getting on so we had to pull ourselves away from this surreal place and move to our last stop for the day. An area of open Acacia scrub about 7kms east of Negelle. Here we had great views again of 3 Prince Ruspoli's Turaco as they moved slowly through the taller Acacia. The supporting cast wasn't too bad either in 1 **Spotted Palm Thrush (✓)**, 1 Whinchat, 1 Red-faced Crombec, 6 **Pectoral Patch Cisticola (✓)**, 1 Grey-backed Camaroptera, 1 African Paradise Flycatcher, 1 Common Fiscal, 16 Northern White-crowned Shrike, 1 **Grey-headed Bush-Shrike (✓)**, 1 **Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike (✓)** and 4 **Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver (✓)**. The light was now fading so we returned to the hotel at dusk and the restaurant for another delicious meal and of course an early night. Even though we were 7 days into the trip I still managed 31 new birds, which says a lot about the bird richness of Ethiopia and indeed the skills of our guides. Our trip list was now up to 340+ species.

3rd Nov 2015

Today we set off early again [0600hrs] and travelled north this time on dirt roads to the **Genale River** region about 80kms away but made a number of off the cuff roadside stops as quite a few new birds were seen from the 4x4's and these included - 2 **White-bellied Bustard** (✓), 2 **Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill** (✓), 16 **Red and Yellow Barbet** (✓), 2 **Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike** (✓) and 2 **Golden-breasted Starling** (✓). We arrived at the river valley about 0800hrs and walked along a path overlooking the river and close fields. Many new species were again seen and included 1 **Goliath Heron** (✓), 1 Little Bittern [seen only by me], 1 Black-shouldered Kite, 2 **Wahlberg's Eagle** (✓), 6 **African Grey Hornbill** (✓), 2 **Black-billed Barbet** (✓), 15 **Wire-tailed Swallow** (✓), 2 **Northern Bulbul** (✓), 1 Pied Wheatear [ssp. – *vittata*], 4 **Speke's Weaver** (✓), 3 male **Juba Weaver** (✓), 6 **Crimson-rumped Waxbill** (✓), 3 **Purple Grenadier** (✓), 1 **Straw-tailed Whydah** (✓) and 2 **Somali Bunting** (✓) as well as 40 other species already encountered. All this interspersed with an in-field breakfast. We started back at 1000hrs and again made a few stops on the way, picking new species from the 4x4's in 1 Short-toed Eagle and 1 **Rufous-crowned Roller** (✓). We arrived back at the hotel at 1230hrs, the temperature was now 39c in the shade so we took a break until 1600hrs.

We went back out in the evening to a set of fields and scrub 10kms west of Negelle for a walk round and picked up some good species in 9 Abdim's Stork, 6 White Stork, 2 Pallid Harrier, 1 Gabar Goshawk, 1 **Eastern Pale-chanting Goshawk** (✓), 2 White-browed Coucal, 6 **Foxy Lark** (✓), 6 **Grassland Pipit** (✓), 2 **White-browed Scrub Robin** (✓), 3 Rattling Cisticola and 2 **Shelley's Starling** (✓). Back at the hotel by dusk but I skipped evening meal after a slight attack of the trots. 23 new species today taking me past 250 lifers and the trip list past 360.

4th Nov 2015

Today was another long travel day but with many birding stops on the way, thankfully I had no repeat of yesterday's troubles, god bless Imodium. In fact our first stop was 1km from the hotel with 2 **Spotted Thick-knee** (✓) in the road in the headlights as we had set out at 0430hrs. We stopped after about 70kms waiting for one of the 4x4's to catch up and were lucky enough to come across a perched **Grey Kestrel** (✓). A little further on the first 4x4 came to a screeching halt as our guide Merid had heard the distinctive call of **Pringle's Puffback** (✓) out of the window and it wasn't long before we were having good views of a pair of this local rarity in a roadside tree. We also picked up **White-winged Dove** (✓), 2 **Somali Crow** (✓) and 2 Bristle-crowned Starling in a small village.

Our first big stop was 120kms into our journey, at the Dawa River near **Melka Ghuba** village. This was the first time local kids mobbed us but they soon lost interest and moved on allowing us to bird in peace while the drivers were making breakfast. The area produced a few new species in 6 **Black-faced Sandgrouse** (✓), 3 **Emerald-spotted Dove** (✓), 1 **Abyssinian Scimitarbill** (✓), 2 **Black-throated Barbet** (✓), 3 Tawny Pipit, 3 **Yellow-vented Eremomela** (✓), 2 **Pale Prinia** (✓), 2 **Pygmy Batis** (✓), 2 **Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird** (✓), 2 **Hunter's Sunbird** (✓) and 3 **Brubru** (✓) [I had somehow missed this species up to now].

After breakfast we continued on our way spotting new birds as we went including 25 **Vulturine Guineafowl** (✓) and Striated Heron as well as many of the better species already seen. Lunch break was at the base of a tree with 50 **Black-capped Social Weaver** (✓) and other birds seen included 2 **Red-naped Bush-Shrike** (✓) and 20 **Lesser Masked Weaver** (✓).

It wasn't very long before acacia give way to the Soda Plains, which was very green due to late rains and it wasn't long before we spotted our first **Stresemann's Bush-Crow** (✓), seeing a total of 17 in small groups of 5 or 6. An hour's walk around the plains saw us gather a good selection of birds like 1 Black-headed Heron, 1

Montagu's Harrier, 1 Gabar Goshawk, 1 Eastern Pale-chanting Goshawk, 1 Augur Buzzard, 1 Tawny Eagle, 1 Crested Francolin, 2 **Buff-crested Bustard (✓)**, 2 **Somali Courser (✓)**, 30 Crowned Plover, 4 White-bellied Goaway Bird, 1 immature **Klaas's Cuckoo (✓)**, 2 Black-billed Wood-hoopoe, 4 species of Hornbill, 1 Cardinal Woodpecker, 4 Foxy Lark, 10 White-tailed Swallow, 4 Grassland Pipit, 2 Northern Wheatear, 1 Boran Cisticola, 3 Yellow-breasted Apalis, 3 **Grey Wren Warbler (✓)**, 6 African Dusky Flycatcher, 1 Abyssinian White-eye, 1 Common Fiscal, 2 **Somali Fiscal (✓)**, 2 Black-headed Oriole, 9 Yellow-spotted Pretonia, 2 Vitelline Masked Weaver, 10 **Chestnut Weaver (✓)**, 2 Black-cheeked Waxbill, 1 Purple Grenadier, 2 Reichenow's Seedeater, 1 **Eastern Paradise Whydah (✓)** [another species I had missed up until now], 6 **White-bellied Canary (✓)** and 2 Somali Bunting.

We arrived at the **Borana Lodge** near **Yabello** just after dark thanks mainly to a new tarmac road of which we used 70kms. The lodge itself was set in fantastic grounds, the chalets were of a good standard and the food was again of high quality. Some of the group had trouble with ants but I had my own Lizard defence force of 3 Gecko's taking turns in eating any ants that made their way through the patio doors. After another good evening meal we had a quick walk around the grounds and managed to get 1 **Donaldson Smith's Nightjar (✓)** in the torchlights. Another 29 ticks today took me past 280 lifers and the trip list up to 390+.

5th Nov 2015

An unusually and welcome late start of 0700hrs saw us re-tracing our steps somewhat as we scoured the woodland about 30kms back along the tarmac road towards Kenya. We sadly failed to find either Somali Crombec or Scaly Chatterer, our first disappointment of the trip but we did see a fine selection of birds here in 1 Black-chested Snake Eagle, 1 White-bellied Bustard, 17 African Orange-bellied Parrot, 2 Little Bee-eater, 6 Northern Red-billed Hornbill, 1 Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, 2 Von Der Decken's Hornbill, 1 Red-fronted Barbet, 12 **Darnaud's Barbet (✓)**, 1 Lesser Honeyguide, 6 Cardinal Woodpecker, 10 **Dodson's Bulbul (✓)**, 6 **Bare-eyed Thrush (✓)**, 1 Yellow-vented Eremomela, 3 **Banded Parisoma (✓)**, 2 Pale Prinia, 4 African Grey and 4 African Dusky Flycatcher, 6 Rufous Chatterer, 2 Northern Grey Tit, 2 Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, 2 Abyssinian White-eye, 4 Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, 1 **Three-streaked Tchagra (✓)**, 2 Black-headed Oriole, 5 Stresemann's Bush-Crow, 4 **Chestnut Sparrow (✓)**, 6 Yellow-spotted Pretonia and 2 Somali Bunting.

We made a couple of brief roadside stops for speciality birds and picked up **Tiny Cisticola (✓)**, **Grosbeak Canary (✓)** and 2 **Bateleur (✓)**. Before moving on to our last stop of the morning a small town about another 20km along the road called **Dubuluk**, whose grasslands held 2 **Temminck's Courser (✓)**, 2 Foxy Lark and 3 **Short-tailed Lark (✓)**. We also had a **Pygmy Falcon (✓)**, on the edge of town. The temperature had gone up to 35c so we returned to the lodge at 1230hrs for some downtime in the heat of the day and I took this opportunity to slowly walk round the campsite and picked up 2 Helmeted Guineafowl, 1 Yellow-necked Spurfowl, 1 Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, 2 photogenic White-browed Coucal, 2 Rufous-crowned Roller, 15 **Lesser-striped Swallow (✓)**, 2 White-tailed Swallow, 1 Spotted-palm Thrush, 2 White-browed Scrub Robin, 1 Grey-backed Camaroptera, 10 Marico Sunbird, 4 Brubru, 2 Red-winged Starling, 2 Shelley's Starling, 4 Yellow-spotted Pretonia, 20 Grey-capped and 50 Black-capped Social Weaver, 6 Vitelline Masked Weaver, 11 Crimson-rumped Waxbill, 5 Black-cheeked Waxbill and 6 Purple Grenadier.

We set off again at 1600hrs to look again for the Crombec and Chatterer, but again failed to find them so we returned to the lodge for another great evening meal. Only 13 ticks today I must be running out of new birds to see.

6th Nov 2015

Today was the travel day that I had been warned about and that everyone before me describes as the worst road they had ever been on, we were all dreading what was to come. We had 300kms to Awassa and was supposed to make it for lunch. We set off at 0700hrs and to my great surprise the first 120kms was new tarmac road and I even picked up two lifers in 4 **Woolly Stork (✓)**, and 2 **African Harrier Hawk (✓)**. But after that we hit dirt and uneven road that slowed us down dramatically. The roads were worse in the towns but nothing as bad as other dirt roads we had travelled and we hit half way by 1030hrs and had a drinks break for an hour at a local hotel at **Agere Maryam**. The road did get worse for a while particularly near **Wenago**, but with only 120kms to go things were going Ok and then we hit a new stretch of tarmac road about 10kms long and after that the dirt roads were much improved and we arrived at the United Africa Hotel, Awassa at 1300hrs. So the road is getting better year by year with new sections of tarmac opening up all the time. So I can confidently state that this part of the journey is no worse than the Negelle to Yabello road.

While everyone else was relaxing with a drink in the heat of the day I went for a quick walk around the grounds and finally caught up with **White-browed Robin Chat (✓)**. After a long lunch we were again on our way and we reached our next destination **Bishangari Lodge, Lake Langano** just after dark. I was allotted the furthest away Chalet that had 6 beds. It turned out to be a good move as the further away from the restaurant the greater the density of wildlife and I was to benefit from this the next morning. Food again was top class in the open air restaurant and still no biting insects. Only 3 ticks today but that was 3 more than I had anticipated. 400 trip list had now been passed and I was just shy of 300 new species myself.

7th Nov 2015

Bishangari at dawn turned out to be a magnificent place for birds and other wildlife. I awoke to the sound of foraging Olive Baboons. I walked through them to the nearby rocky shoreline and immediately spotted 2 **Senegal Thick-knee (✓)** took a few photos then called the others as it was a tick for quite a few of them. From here we went to the beach area where 80+ Yellow-fronted Parrot had come to feed. A Black-crowned Crane flew by and a Squacco heron sat tight 5 meters away. After another sumptuous breakfast we walked the woods behind the chalets and then along the wood edge along the outer fence line. A good number of species were seen some new in African Harrier Hawk, 3 **Lemon Dove (✓)**, 1 Black-winged Lovebird, 1 White-cheeked Turaco, 1 Klaas's Cuckoo, 4 Mottled Swift (✓), 1 **Narina's Trogon (✓)**, 1 Woodland Kingfisher, 1 African Pygmy Kingfisher, 20 Blue-breasted Bee-eater, 1 Eurasian Roller, 1 Abyssinian Roller, 1 Black-billed Wood-Hoopoe, 2 Northern Red-billed Hornbill, 4 **Hemprich's Hornbill (✓)**, 2 Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, 2 **Red-fronted Tinkerbird (✓)**, 3 Red-fronted Barbet, 3 **Banded Barbet (✓)**, 3 **Double-toothed Barbet (✓)**, 1 **Scaly-throated Honeyguide (✓)**, 1 Lesser Honeyguide, 2 Nubian Woodpecker, 1 Grey-headed Woodpecker, 6 Black Saw-wing, 40 Ethiopian Swallow, 30 Yellow Wagtail, 1 **Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrike (✓)**, 1 **Black Cuckoo-shrike (✓)**, 1 Ruppell's Robin Chat, 4 Common Redstart, 2 African Thrush, 1 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, 2 Red-faced Crombec, 1 Chiffchaff, 2 Willow Warbler, 1 Whitethroat, 1 Lesser Whitethroat, 1 Grey-backed Camaroptera, 2 each of African Grey, African Dusky and African Paradise Flycatcher, 2 Black-headed Batis, 6 White-rumped Babbler, 1 Scarlet-chested Sunbird, 4 Beautiful Sunbird, 1 Marico Sunbird, 4 Grey-backed Fiscal, 2 Northern White-crowned Shrike, 1 Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike, 1 Northern Puffback, 1 Ethiopian Boubou, 1 Brubru, 6 White-crested Helmet-Shrike, 5 Eurasian Golden Oriole, 2 **Abyssinian Oriole (✓)**, 17 **Black-winged Red Bishop (✓)**, 2 Red-billed Firefinch and 3 Bronze Mannikin – now that's a fine mornings birding.

After lunch we employed a local guide to take us to the nearby marsh [this enabled us not to be bothered by locals], which was only 500yds from my chalet as it happens. Hundreds of waders, herons and wildfowl were present of many species, the best being 16 **Pink-backed Pelican (✓)**, 6 Squacco Heron, 1 **Yellow-billed Egret (✓)**, 4 Purple Heron, 2 Hadada Ibis, 2 Lesser Flamingo, 4 Hottentot Teal, 1 Black-chested Snake Eagle, 2 African Harrier Hawk, 1 Common Buzzard, 40 Red-knobbed Coot, 5 African Jacana, 6 Avocet, 15 Kittlitz's Plover, 10 Little Stint, 1 Temminck's Stint, 1 **African Snipe (✓)**, 1 Marsh Sandpiper, Grey-headed Gull, 25 White-winged Tern and finally on the walk back 2 Abyssinian Ground Hornbill. Another great meal and early night was the order of the day. 14 new species saw me passing 310 new species and 420 for the trip list. I could have stayed at **Bishangari Lodge** for another couple of days but sadly it was time to move on tomorrow.

8th Nov 2015

I was up early as I had missed one species from yesterday and made sure today before the bus left that I saw 2 **Scaly Francolin (✓)** just behind my chalet. Our last bird on leaving was a fine pair of Cut-throat Finch nesting in the entrance building. Our first stop was only a few kilometres away on the banks of Lake Langano, again some good birds were seen and included 1 Pink-backed Pelican, 6 Squacco Heron, 1 Goliath Heron, 1 Shikra, 20 Kittlitz's Plover, 2 Three-banded Plover, 2 Curlew Sandpiper, 1 Common Snipe, 1 **Blue-spotted Wood Dove (✓)**, 2 **Black Scimitarbill (✓)**, 2 **Mosque Swallow (✓)** and 2 White-winged Black Tit.

From here we moved to Lake Abiata with 20,000 Greater Flamingo, 50,000 Lesser Flamingo and 1,000+ Common Crane proving to be quite a spectacle. We lunched at Lake Ziway again and afterwards walked the same route as before and saw an equal number of species with new ones for the site being 17 Yellow-billed Stork, 3 Eurasian Teal, 4 Red-billed Duck, 1 **Great Sparrowhawk (✓)**, 1 African Snipe, 1 Whiskered Tern, 1 White Wagtail and 10 **Red-billed Oxpecker (✓)**.

We arrived at the **Maya Hotel, Adama** just after dusk. The hotel was quite luxurious and the food equally so, but we had a very early start so no time for opulence and off to bed. Only 6 new species today took me past 320 lifers and the trip list to 440+.

9th Nov 2015

A very early start at 0430hrs was not what the doctor ordered, but we had to leave this early to get to the Fantale Crater area by dawn and we were bang on time when we arrived. Our main goal was the endemic **Sombre Chat (✓)** and after quite a bit of searching we found at least 2 birds in the ancient lava flows next to **Lake Beseka**, this saved us the trouble of walking up the side of the crater's wall. Other birds in the area included 1 African Darter, 1 Pink-backed Falcon, 16 Egyptian Vulture, 1 Pallid Harrier, 1 Montagu's Harrier, 8 Blackstart, 2 Common Rock Thrush and 1 **Striolated Bunting (✓)**.

From here we moved north and stopped for lunch at a small village café whose gardens held 25 **Wattled Starling (✓)**, our only birds of the trip. We entered **Awash Park Reserve** via the main road that runs through it and stopped briefly at **Ceda Camp** for **Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit (✓)**, but because of a 2 year drought very few birds were present, the best being Yellow-necked Spurrow. We decided to continue onwards.

We turned off the main road just after the "State" border customs post and travelled on a 12km dirt road to **Bilen Lodge**. On this road we had close **Arabian Bustard (✓)** and **Chestnut-headed Sparrow Lark (✓)**. We arrived at the Lodge itself at 1600hrs, which was set overlooking a fresh marsh and birdlife was some of the best we had encountered. **Bilen Lodge** was my favourite site of all those visited in Ethiopia and I could have stayed here much longer. With 2hrs light left we went for a walk with an armed guard who found 4hr old Lion tracks which was a reality check. Nevertheless a good list of birds was compiled and included 6 Night Heron, 4 Squacco Heron, 2 Purple Heron, 1 Yellow-billed Stork, 2 **Saddle-billed Stork (✓)**, 40 Glossy Ibis, 3 African Fish Eagle, 1 Marsh Harrier, 1 Steppe Eagle, 1 Peregrine, 2 Common

Crane, 16 **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (✓)** on the ground, 3 Little Bee-eater, 4 Northern Carmine Bee-eater, 1 Black Scimitarbill, 1 Abyssinian Scimitarbill, 3 **Yellow-breasted Barbet (✓)**, 1 Cardinal Woodpecker, 1 perched **Banded Martin (✓)**, 10 Wire-tailed Swallow, 2 Ethiopian Swallow, 15 Yellow Wagtail, 2 White-browed Scrub Robin, 1 Yellow-vented Eremomela, 1 **Grey-headed Batis (✓)**, 3 **Nile Valley Sunbird (✓)**, 2 Common Fiscal, 2 Grey-backed Fiscal and 1 Brubru. At dinner we watched the sun go down over the marsh and any photos taken couldn't do it justice. Another great meal and we went to sleep to the sound of not too distant Lions roaring. Back up to 12 new species today taking me to 340 new species very close to my target of 350 and the list total to 450+.

10th Nov 2015

We had tea and biscuits in the restaurant building at dawn ready for a pre-breakfast walk that produced 100+ Cattle Egret, 1 Saddle-billed Stork, 1 Arabian Bustard, 3 Ruff, 1 Green Sandpiper, 25 Wood Sandpiper, 48 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, 5 Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, 1 White-browed Coucal, Slender-tailed Nightjar [H], 2 **African Palm Swift (✓)**, 6 Yellow-breasted Barbet, 1 male **Menetries Warbler (✓)**, 1 Grey Wren Warbler, 6 Grey-headed Batis, 2 Nile Valley Sunbird and 2 Yellow-spotted Pretonia.

After breakfast we had to leave this idyllic place and move on. The journey wasn't too far today so we stopped on the main road and successfully saw 3 **Somali Ostrich (✓)** and 1 **Black Scrub Robin (✓)** the only two birds of the area we had yet to connect with. Not far from our next overnight stay were the **Ilala Sala Plains** and we had plenty of time to do a full loop of the plains on dirt roads. The plains were mammal rich as well as the birds and these included 1 **Secretary Bird (✓)**, 60 Helmeted Guineafowl, 3 Crested Francolin, 3 Arabian Bustard, 2 Buff-crested Bustard, 5 White-bellied Bustard, 2 **Heuglin's Courser (✓)**, 1 White-browed Coucal, 1 African Grey Hornbill, 1 **Gillet's Lark (✓)**, 15 **Chestnut-headed Sparrow Lark (✓)**, 10 Wire-tailed Swallow and 2 **Red-fronted Warbler (✓)**.

We arrived at **Awash Falls Lodge, Wash Park Reserve** just before dusk and had a lavish evening meal before retiring to our chalets. Overnight I was bitten to death by insects and mosquitos and the nets were very little help, inspection of the chalet in the morning showed there were plenty of gaps in the stonework for them to enter. This was the only negative of the trip. 8 new species today took me close to 350 and the trip list to 460 species.

11th Nov 2015

An early pre-dawn start for another foray around the plains before breakfast proved rewarding seeing new mammals and more interesting birds that included 47 Abdim's Stork, 1 Black-shouldered Kite, 1 Steppe Eagle, 1 Pygmy Falcon, 1 Lanner Falcon, 2 Buff-crested Bustard, 3 White-bellied Bustard, 1 Striped Kingfisher, 2 **Olive Bee-eater (✓)**, 1 Yellow-breasted Barbet, 1 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, 2 **Ashy Cisticola (✓)**, 1 Red-fronted Warbler, 1 Grey-headed Batis, 3 Rosy-patched Bush Shrike, 1 Black-crowned Tchagra, 5 Red-billed Oxpecker, 4 Yellow-spotted Pretonia, 6 Northern Red Bishop and 2 **Green-winged Pytilia (✓)**.

After breakfast we started our long journey to the Northern Highlands but after an hour we hit the expressway, a new three-lane Motorway and were in **Addis Ababa** in no time. The journey from **Addis** to our next overnight stop at **Debra Birhan** was on a good road and we arrived before dark Hotel Eva was another high quality hotel and the food was excellent, but as usual we went to bed early ready for tomorrow's extremely early start. 3 new species today took me closer to my target of 350 species.

12th Nov 2015

Left the comfort of our hotel at 0430hrs and travelled north-west on dirt track along the upland plateau until we arrived at the Jemma Valley escarpment at 0700hrs. First stop was a little way down the escarpment where locals guided us onto 2 **Erckel's Francolin** (✓) and 1 **Harwood's Francolin** (✓) with ease. Also present were 8 Abyssinian Black Wheatear, 1 Ortolan Bunting, 8 **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting** (✓) and 6 **Ruppell's Black Chat** (✓).

After this we travelled straight down the cliff-face from 10,000 feet to the valley bottom at 3,000 feet picking up 2 **White-billed Starling** (✓) and 1 **Long-billed Pipit** (✓) on the way. We stopped for breakfast at a small "secret" side river that Sunbird had been visiting over the last couple of years and from here we had a rewarding 3hr walk along the lower reaches of the river. Birds recorded included 2 Dark-chanting Goshawk, 1 Three-banded Plover, 1 Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, 50 Namaqua Dove, 1 African Pygmy Kingfisher, 1 **Half-collared Kingfisher** (✓), 3 Pied Kingfisher, 2 **Vinaceous Dove** (✓), 2 African Grey Hornbill, 4 Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, 2 Black-billed Barbet, 1 Lesser Honeyguide, 10 Lesser Striped Swallow, 2 Mocking Cliff Chat, 1 Common Redstart, 1 **Foxy Cisticola** (✓), 2 African Paradise Flycatcher, 3 Ethiopian Boubou, 4 **Bush Pretonia** (✓), 2 **Black-faced Firefinch** (✓), 2 **Black-cheeked Waxbill** (✓), 6 Red-billed Firefinch, 2 Cut-throat Finch, 15 Pin-tailed Whydah, 1 **White-throated Seedeater** (✓), 6 **Yellow-fronted Canary** (✓), 12 Black-winged Red Bishop, 6 **African Silverbill** (✓), 5 Somali Bunting and finally 2 **Red-billed Pytilia** (✓), supposedly the hardest of the endemics to find. I guess we were just lucky as they fed on the ground just metres from us for over 2 minutes.

We went for a quick walk along the main road on the way back and picked up 1 **Copper Sunbird** (✓) [seen by me only as it shot off as everyone left the bus], 1 Woodchat Shrike and 12 **Speckle-fronted Weaver** (✓).

We returned back up the escarpment and half-way up had an in-field lunch prepared by our driver and guides. While waiting we acquired a good list of birds in 2 Augur Buzzard, 1 Booted Eagle, 5 Thekla Lark, 15 Rock Martin, 10 Wire-tailed Swallow, 2 Ruppell's Black Chat, 2 White-winged Cliff Chat, 1 Blue Rock Thrush, 2 Mountain Thrush, 1 Montane White-eye, 2 White-billed Starling and 2 Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, 1 Ortolan Bunting.

Back up on the Plateau we stopped for great views of 2 **Erlanger's Lark** (✓), with a very close passing Verreaux's Eagle. The rest of the journey back to the hotel was spotting highland species from the bus that we had already seen in the Bale Mountains like 2 Wattled Ibis, 1 Blue-winged Goose [on a haystack], 1 Pallid Harrier, 1 Peregrine, 15 White-collared Pigeon, 40 Dusky Turtle Dove, 2 Groundscraper Thrush and 10 Black-headed Siskin.

We arrived back at the hotel before dark which was unusual and had time to relax before another delicious evening meal and again an early night, this time we needed it after a long day in the field. After a good day I had 19 new species taking me to 366 ticks, way passed my 350 target. The overall trip list was on 498 birds – 2 short of the magical 500.

13th Nov 2015

This was our last day in Ethiopia and we awoke to heavy rain, the plan today was to visit the Ankober Valley, but half way along the dirt road had collapsed and 2 Lorries had also broken down and blocked the way through, so we had to abandon this and return to the hotel for breakfast. We then drove north to 11,000 feet, when we arrived at the viewpoint site the rain had got heavier and the wind was near gale force strength and the mist had cut visibility to 10 feet. The chance of seeing Ethiopia's prize bird species looked grim indeed. So we parked up and stayed in the bus more out of hope more than anything else. Within 5 minutes our guide Merid said he could hear them and as if by magic a pair of **Ankober Serin** (✓) appeared out of the gloom and came to within feet of the bus giving us all great views

and also a great sigh of relief. After our fill we decided to drop back down out of the clouds and stopped briefly at a river bridge on the main road to see what was about, We recorded about 25 species but the only noteworthy species were 6 Groundscraper Thrush and 1 immature male **Fan-tailed Widowbird (✓)**, my last tick of the trip.

Lunch in the hotel was followed by the journey back to **Addis Ababa** for our flight home. We did see a few more good birds beside the road in 2 Lammergeier at a rubbish tip just outside **Addis** and a Black Stork at a small Pool about halfway.

We arrived at **The Jupiter Hotel, Addis Ababa** at 1600hrs where it had all began 18 days ago. Try as I might I couldn't get Nyanza Swift from my room window before dark, though I later found out that people facing the other way had had them around nearby buildings. After dinner we caught a direct flight back to London with Ethiopian Airlines leaving at 0150hrs and arriving back in the UK at 0730hrs [-3hrs] on the 14th November and I slept most of the way so time flew by.

Overall the trip was superb and well led by the local and Sunbird guides. The Accommodation and food was of a higher quality than I was expecting and the company itself was very good and full of characters. I had 368 new species, with the official trip list at exactly 500 of which I saw 485 bird species. Any birder that reads this will have already realized that they will have to go to Ethiopia before they die and I can thoroughly recommend this Sunbird trip to everyone. Also saw about 30 species of Butterfly, 15 species of Dragonfly and 41 species of Mammal and reptile including Hippopotamus, Zebra, and Crocodile plus roaring Lions.

Martyn Hnatiuk