

Birding trip report: Ethiopia, January 29 - February 21, 2011

Participants: *Sander Bot*, *Rob Gordijn*, *Jelmer Poelstra*, *Sjoerd Radstaak*, *Bas van Schooten*.

Trip report written by *Sander Bot* (sander.bot at yahoo.co.uk), *Rob Gordijn* (gordijnrob at gmail.com), and *Jelmer Poelstra* (jelmerpoelstra at gmail.com). Feel free to contact any or all of us for questions, comments, or to point out errors in the report. For questions about GPS points and files, contact Jelmer.

Introduction

This is a report of a 24-day independent birding trip to Ethiopia by 5 Dutch friends. We rented a Jeep with driver, but without local guide. Because we still wanted to see all the good birds, we invested a lot of time in preparation of the trip. In the end, we were pretty successful as we recorded over 550 species, including all possible endemics (ok ok, we skipped *Nechisar Nightjar*). Doing an independent trip is thus definitely feasible, as a few other groups before us have also demonstrated. If your birding and/or preparation time is more limited, however, it's probably better to take a local guide along, or join one of the many available tours.

Besides the Ethiopia & Eritrea endemics, highlights and unexpected sightings included *Common Ostrich*, *Swallow-tailed Kite*, *Ovambo Sparrowhawk*, *Lesser Jacana*, *Caspian Plover*, *Yellow-throated Sandgrouse*, *Short-tailed Lark*, *Desert Wheatear*, *House Sparrow* (1st for the country), *Green-backed Twinspot*, *Red-billed Pytilia*, *Black-faced Firefinch* and *Grey-headed Silverbill*.

Notable misses were *Orange River Francolin* (possible future split; but little to no good site info; *Nechisar* is probably the best place, but we couldn't access that area), *Red-winged Lark* (somehow not found in Awash), *Red-chested Swallow* (not found at Sululta and Dinsho), *Abyssinian Crimsonwing* (despite much searching along streams, no sign of it in Hareenna) and *Stripe-breasted (Reichard's) Seedeater* (possible future split; is sometimes seen in Gibe, and we paid close attention, but to no avail).

Itinerary

<u>day</u>	<u>date</u>	<u>site(s)</u>
1	29/1	Addis Ababa, Sululta Plains, Portuguese Bridge
2	30/1	Jemma Valley
3	31/1	Jemma Valley, Ankober, Melka Gebdu
4	1/2	Melka Gebdu, Afar Plains, Awash NP
5	2/2	Awash NP
6	3/2	Ali Dege Plains, Bilen Lodge, Awash NP
7	4/2	Awash NP, Lake Ziway, Wondo Genet
8	5/2	Wondo Genet, Bale: Dinsho Area
9	6/2	Bale: Sanetti plateau, Hareenna,
10	7/2	Hareenna, Ruspoli's Turaco, Negele
11	8/2	Liben Plains, Filtu

12	9/2	Filtu, Bogol Manyo
13	10/2	Bogol Manyo, Negele
14	11/2	Negele, Dawa River, Yabello
15	12/2	Yabello
16	13/2	Arero Forest
17	14/2	Yabello, Nechisar NP
18	15/2	Nechisar NP, Awassa
19	16/2	Awassa, Lake Bojo
20	17/2	Lake Langano, Lake Abiata, Lake Awassa
21	18/2	Bishangari, Lake Ziway, Lake Koka
22	19/2	Debre Zeyt Lakes, Menagesha Forest
23	20/2	Gibe Gorge
24	21/2	Gibe Gorge, Addis Ababa

Some notes on our itinerary:

* We stayed longer in the Jemma Valley compared to most organized tours, which often do the Jemma Valley and Ankober on one day. When doing so, one needs to find both *Red-billed Pytilia* and *White-throated Seedeater* in one morning, and in practice, often only one of the two is seen. We were happy to take some extra time here, and to tick both goodies.

* We skipped Sof Omar as we placed our bets on seeing *Salvadori's Serin* in Filtu, but since that failed, we had to go to Arero forest (by then, backtracking to Sof Omar is not an option). Unless you take the southern loop counter-clockwise, we therefore recommend playing it safe with the *Salvadori's* by visiting Sof Omar.

* Most tours spend only a few hours in the Hareenna Forest, in between the Sanetti plateau and the Genale River. We spent both an afternoon and a morning at Hareenna, giving us some time to explore this fantastic forest. Nonetheless we did manage to miss what is probably the main target there: *Abyssinian Crimsonwing*...

* We went to Bogol Manyo, but we are not sure whether any company still wants to go there at this point. Many were already reluctant, and our company (Ethiopian Quadrants) is likely to be too, now, since we had some trouble with the head of the UN there. Adding insult to injury, we could actually not bird the location properly, since one of us fell seriously ill there.

* We spent some left-over time in the forest called Bishangari at the southeastern side of Lake Langano. This was an enjoyable place and very successful birdwise, with e.g. *Green-backed Twinspot* (30-40 birds!), *Yellowbill* (both heard and seen) and *Red-capped Robin-chat*. This forest is in a much better condition than the famous but heavily degraded Wondo Genet.

* We spent more than a full day at Gibe Gorge. Probably at least partly because of this, we had a very good score there, with e.g. many *Yellow-throated* and some *Four-banded Sandgrouse*, *Red-billed Pytilia*, and most of the more regular specialties. It is advisable to stay overnight in nearby Welkite instead of all the way in Addis, so you can be in the gorge at dawn and dusk.

* As mentioned above, the 'southern loop' can in theory be done counter-clockwise: after the Rift Valley, one then visits Yabello → Dawa River → Genale → Hareenna → Sanetti → Dinsho & Sof Omar, instead of the other way around. The main advantage of this is that you can look for *Salvadori's Serin* at Filtu, where most people go birding anyway. If you are successful there, you can save a day by skipping Sof Omar (otherwise there aren't many unique birds at Sof Omar, apart from *Brown-tailed Rock Chat*). There are however also major disadvantages to the counter-clockwise route: first, this make it hard to get to the Dawa River by early morning, and second and more importantly, one cannot obtain permits for crossing the Sanetti plateau (or camping at Hareenna Forest) when entering from the south -- these can only be obtained at the HQ in the Dinsho area. Potentially there could be a way around the latter problem if you try to arrange something with your car rental company, who may be able to get permits in advance.

Car rental

We rented a Nissan Patrol at <http://www.ethiopianquadrants.com> and paid \$160 a day. This included a driver and petrol. In Ethiopia, renting a Jeep always comes with a driver. In fact, you sorely need a driver anyway, since finding your way through Ethiopia on your own is difficult, especially when it comes to communication with locals (most people only speak Amharic). Our driver Mesfin knew all the hotels and did almost all communication, making him indispensable. Since we were with five birders, six persons had to fit in the Jeep, so we ended up with two persons on the front seat, which is slightly uncomfortable. It also made packing our luggage into the trunk a fresh new challenge for each morning.

All in all, we can certainly recommend Ethiopian Quadrants. Mesfin was an excellent driver, and the office was very helpful both before and during (e.g. when one of us fell ill) the trip. Moreover, they are familiar with all the places that birders want to visit. They also have no problems with driving at night. Although Mesfin was only moderately interested in birds, he did remember many of the stopping places for specific birds -- where we had a GPS point, he would often already stop spontaneously... If you take a company that has no experience with birders, you are likely to find out that they do not want to drive at night, do not know all the places you want to see, etc. The only problem we had was that Mesfin had not taken any camping gear for some reason, and therefore generally tried to avoid camping. Besides a monetary tip, we decided to give Mesfin a *Birds of HoA* guide as a goodbye present, since he was still carrying around a "Birds of Africa - South of the Sahara", which tricked him into a few misidentifications. Now he still needs a new pair of bins!

Food and accommodation

In general, we had no problems getting food. The further inland you go, though, the more limited the choice in food becomes. The national food in Ethiopia is injera, a bitter sort of pancake. Most of us did not like it, and often the only other choice is spaghetti. This is served only with meat sauce, without vegetables. In Addis, other bigger cities, and the Rift Lakes area, food is much better with more choice. Bread is widely available, but spreads are not, so we bought a lot of that in advance in Addis (canned fish, marmalade etc.).

Ethiopian Quadrants tried to convince us to book all accommodation in advance. However, we wanted to be flexible, e.g. in case we needed more time for an endemic bird, or were quicker than anticipated. We therefore did not book any hotels in advance, except for in Addis. The downside of this approach is that hotels may be fully booked upon arrival. Fortunately, we faced a fully-booked hotel only once (in Goba, where we had to camp on the hotel grounds -- this did result in a nice *Verreaux's Eagle Owl*). So in our experience, when travelling independently, booking in advance is not necessary. Our driver often called ahead to hotels during the day, especially if we would arrive late, and this worked fine. Western style hotels in Ethiopia are quite expensive, but we were happy to stay in local style hotels -- these can be very cheap. They usually consist of a small room with one bed and a chair. On a few occasions, we were not allowed to sleep with two persons in one room, since those two persons would have been of the same gender.

Accommodation details (incomplete):

Addis Ababa:	Bel Air Hotel (AD03), two twin rooms, one 115 birr, one 200 birr per night. Kaleb Hotel (AD01).
Jemma Valley:	Camping on the land of a farmer (JE12): 200 birr in total.
Ankober:	Local hotel, 3 rooms including dinner: 600 birr.
Awash NP:	Awash Falls Lodge (AS07) 100 birr per tent per night.
Wondo Genet:	Wabe Shebelle Hotel (WO03): twin room + 3 persons camping: 900 birr.
Goba:	Camping at the Wabe Shebelle Hotel (BS01) grounds: 810 birr.
Negele:	Nile Hotel, 100 birr per person, good hotel for Negele standards.
Yabello:	Hawi Hotel.
Mojo:	100 birr per room.
Langano:	Bekele Molla (LA05): Bungalow for 5 persons: 540 birr per night.
Sashemene:	Bekele Molla, 120 birr per single room.
Awassa:	United Africa (AW01): 450 birr for a double.
Welkite:	?? Hotel at GI01 , 100 birr per room, good restaurant.

Weather & season

February is in the middle of the dry season in Ethiopia. We therefore experienced hardly any rain, except for one short shower while driving back from Arero to Yabello. The drought was also reflected in the landscape of Ethiopia -- it was beautiful but extremely barren, almost without any green, except in some of the forests. Unfortunately, this year was much drier than average, which certainly seemed to negatively affect bird activity (see below). In order to enjoy lush landscapes and higher bird activity (especially song, which was rarely heard now), Oct-Dec, at the start of the dry season, may be a better time to visit. The downside of Oct-Dec is that the rainy season may occasionally extend into this period, and/or some tracks may be still wet and therefore hard or impossible to drive on. This is especially true for Nechisar, but since that area was inaccessible anyway, and may still be, it doesn't matter. On balance, considering others' trip reports and our own experiences, we would thus recommend going in one the last few months of the year.

Temperatures are high but it is mostly not extremely hot, with maxima generally balancing around 30 degrees. However, out on the vast plains of the southern part of the country, with hardly any wind, temperatures often reach up to 35-40 degrees in the afternoon. The 'hottest' place we went to was probably the Dawa River, where we found ourselves sweating heavily in search of three near-endemics. It was only there and at Gibe that we took a longer lunch break to cool down, but generally, one can easily keep birding all day at most places.

General remarks on birding in Ethiopia

Birding in Ethiopia does not only mean a total number of bird species that is almost equivalent to spending a few weeks in South America, but also gets you a lot of (near-)endemics. In addition, almost all endemic species are common and relatively easy to see, with *Nechisar Nightjar* as the most glaring exception. We had some difficulties with *Salvadori's Serin*, but that was because we arrogantly skipped Sof Omar, in order to save some time and explore new areas. Of course, a few other species may at times be hard to find and easily missed, but in general, the target birds are not that difficult to tick. Furthermore, most birds are pretty easy to photograph. Light conditions are harsh, except for in the early morning and late afternoon. Daylight was mostly from around 05:30 to 17:30.

Preparation

We first ordered and read through the field guide, as well as the two new and very useful WTWB guides, Spottiswoode et al and Behrens et al. We then downloaded all the trip reports we could find on the Travelling Birder website (link below) and other sites. Many trip reports are of guided tours (Birdquest, Tropical Birding, Rockjumper, etc), which contain a lot of beautiful prose and interesting trivia about bird species, but relatively little detailed information on actual sightings. Nonetheless, when all these reports are put together, there is definitely some useful information to be distilled. Even more useful were some of the trip reports by independent birders, such as the one by Lieven de Temmerman (link below). We prepared a few spreadsheets to collect information on which species were seen where by each trip. This turned out to be especially useful to get a clear picture of the whereabouts and abundance of many of the 'semi-targets', i.e. birds that are not endemic, or within Ethiopia clearly limited to one specific spot, but that could (perhaps) easily be missed if we weren't aware about their specifics.

Travelling birder site for Ethiopia: http://www.travellingbirder.com/birdwatching/birding_Ethiopia.php?from=1&to=12

Lieven de Temmerman report: <http://www.freewebs.com/lievendetemmerman/ethiopia%202009%20travel%20report%20pdf.pdf>

GPS points

GPS points are referred to in the report a lot, and they can be recognized by capital letters and underscores, as well as always being underlined in the text.

A complete list of GPS points is in a separate file, and can also be requested from Jelmer in e.g. **.kml** (for Google Maps), **.gpx** (for GPS devices and GPS software), or **.gdb** (Garmin DataBase, Garmin's own format for its software -- *this file also includes all the gps tracks from our trip*) format.

The GPS points include not only those that we recorded ourselves during and after the trip, but also many points from Spottiswoode et al., Behrens et al., and several other trip reports. Many of the points are referred to in the report and especially the species list, e.g. in all cases where they document a specific location where we see a certain species. Many other points are however not referred to, e.g. locations where other trips saw specific species. The long names in the GPS list and GPS files (as opposed to the truncated names referred to in the species list and the report) should be descriptive enough to figure out what each point is for.

Prefixes used in the text in front of GPS references:

- “a:”, followed by the name of the GPS point (e.g.: “a: **AF01**”), means that the species was seen in the area near (at most at a short walking distance away from) this exact location.
- “x:”, followed by the name of the GPS point (e.g.: “x: **AF01**”) means that the GPS point was taken specifically for this species and the species was thus seen at or from this exact location.

Explanation of the names of GPS points:

The first two capital letters are abbreviations of the area (see below for a list).

- If the GPS point is our own, or is taken from a different trip (report), this abbreviation is followed immediately by a number, e.g. **AF01**.
- For GPS points from Spottiswoode et al., the area abbreviation is followed by “_Sp” and then a number, e.g. **AF_Sp30**. The numbers correspond to those in Spottiswoode et al.
- For GPS points from Behrens et al., the area abbreviation is followed by “_Be” and then a capital letter, e.g. “**AF_BeA**”. The capital letters correspond to those in Behrens et al.

References

Birds of the Horn of Africa, N. Redman, T. Stevenson, and J. Fanshawe, 2009.

Where to watch birds in Ethiopia, C. Spottiswoode, M. Gabremichael, and J. Francis, 2010.

Birding Ethiopia, K. Behrens, K. Barnes, and C. Boix, 2010.

There is much overlap with the previous book, but it is still worth buying both.

Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea, J. Ash and J. Atkins, 2009.

This is mainly a distributional atlas, not quite necessary for most visiting birders.

Acknowledgements

First of all, thanks to Ethiopian Quadrants and Mesfin for car rental and driving, and the opportunity for us to even go up to Bogol Manyo. Thanks to the following persons with whom we have been in contact about this trip, mostly during preparation (in alphabetical order): Ken Behrens, Daniel Bengtsson, Christian Boix, Hugues Dufourny, Trevor Hardaker, Stig Holmstedt, Jacques Erard, Bart de Keersmaecker, Mikael Käll, David Marques, Andy Mears, Teet Sirotkin, Toon Spanhove, Lieven de Temmerman, and Thomas Varto.

1. Addis Ababa [29/01 & 21/02]

Addis Ababa was our departure point, and we also ended the trip here. When picking up the rental car at dawn (at the Ethiopian Quadrants HQ at **AD02**), we excitedly saw our first lifers in town, but all of them were common birds. Perhaps one sighting worth mentioning is that of

Banded Barbet at the Bel Air Hotel ([AD03](#)). Some birds for which Addis is one of the better places in Ethiopia include *Nyanza Swift* and *Brown Parisoma*.

2. Sululta Plains [29/01: 07-12h]

After two hours of sleep and the necessary shopping (Nutella hazelnut flavoured sweet spread, and so on) in Addis, we went to the Sululta Plains for our first morning of birding in Ethiopia. These highland plains start directly north of Addis, and extend northward almost to Debre Libanos. The road through the area is high quality tar, and birding is done by making some stops along the road, especially near river crossings, and walking around in the easily accessible grasslands.

Our first stop was at [SU01](#) (07:05-08:10). Here we first walked on the fields to the west of the road. We saw our first **Blue-winged Geese** and **Red-throated Pipits** (abundant), 10 **Ortolan Buntings**, 3 **Black-winged Plovers**, and 10 **Red-breasted Wheatears**. After almost half an hour, we found **Abyssinian Longclaw** on a small stony hill a bit south to where we parked, along the road. It then flew across the road, where there are small fields and sheds directly along the road, also with some running water. Here, we got nice views of a pair of *Longclaws*, and also found another target: **Erlanger's Lark**. Other birds seen included **Ethiopian Cisticola** (in the wet area), **Red-billed Oxpecker**, 5 **Black-headed Siskins** and an overhead **Bearded Vulture**.

Next stop was the Duber River crossing, [SU_Sp11](#) (08:25-09:30). Here we walked to the west along the river, which looks more like a small stream. In the river we were surprised to find 4 **African Black Ducks**. While walking along the river we heard singing **Erlanger's Larks**, saw 50 **Plain Martins**, a **Moorland Chat**, 15 **Yellow Bishops**, 2 **Augur Buzzards**, 1 **Red-rumped Swallow**, 1 **African Spoonbill**, 2 **Nyanza Swifts**, 2 **White-backed Vultures**, 2 **Abyssinian Longclaws**, **Rüppell's Vulture** and 2 **Tawny Eagles**. After 350m, the path goes through a field, where we found a **Pectoral-patch Cisticola** skulking sneakily through the grass.

At site [SU_BeC](#) (09:35-10:00), we unsuccessfully searched for *Red-chested Swallow*. Here, we did see our first **Lanner**, a female **White-headed Vulture**, 2 **Abyssinian Longclaws**, 1 **Erlanger's Lark**, 1 **Black Stork** and another **Pectoral-patch Cisticola**, foraging well visible in short grass along with Longclaws and other birds. Next stop was another river crossing at [SU02](#) (10:45-11:10), where we found a male **African Stone-chat**, 3 **Ethiopian Cisticolas** and a group of 6 non-br males **Pin-tailed Whydah**.

We had our lunch at [SU_BeD](#) (11:25-12:00), a nice marsh area with still some open water, directly east of the road at the northern end of the plains. **Spot-breasted Plover** appeared to be common here with some 15-20 individuals. Many other birds were present here, including 90 **Yellow-billed Ducks**, up to 40 **Black-winged Plover**, 10 **Blue-winged Geese**, many **Groundscraper Thrushes**, **Tawny Eagle**, 35 **Ruff** etc. All **Yellow Wagtails** here were *feldegg*, while the birds on the more dryer plains earlier today were all *flava*. After lunch, we

headed for the Portuguese Bridge (Debre Libanos).

Species that we did not see here, but for which Sululta is a good site: _

Red-chested Swallow (also possible in Dinsho), *Yellow Bishop* (idem), *Quail Finch* (idem, though rarely encountered in general), *Yellow-crowned Bishop* (rarely), *Fan-tailed Widowbird* (rarely).

3. Debre Libanos and the Portuguese Bridge [29/01: 12h30-dusk]

We arrived at around 12:30 at the Ethio-German Hotel (DL01), which is situated along the main road near the Portuguese Bridge. After checking in, we first had a coke at the hotel to enjoy the quite spectacular scenery. **Fan-tailed Raven** was abundant, and **Rüppell's Vultures** were soaring over the ridge, as were a pair each of **Bearded Vultures** and **Verreaux's Eagles**. Twice a small falcon flew past, which really looked like a *Barbary Falcon*, but we could not clinch the ID.

From the hotel, we took the small track to the Portuguese bridge, which is situated only a few hundred meters away from the hotel, at DL02. After 100m, in some scrub along the path, we found two **Stout Cisticolas**. Not many trips pay attention to this species, but according to the Birds of HoA, the Ethiopian population is a potential split. This might be a reliable site, and elsewhere we only saw the species in the Gibe Gorge. At the same spot, we also saw a **Long-billed Pipit**. At the bridge, locals were asking for an entrance fee for the bridge. We didn't know whether we should pay and enter, but since all the specialties can already be seen before you enter the bridge, we did not. Just before the bridge, it's possible to look down in the gorge, and from there we saw **Rüppell's Black Chat**, **Mocking Cliff Chat** and **White-winged Cliff Chat**.

Having seen all the targets at the bridge area by 15h, we went to the Debre Libanos monastery. This is some five km from the hotel, at the end of a small road heading eastwards from near the hotel (DL03). About halfway to the monastery, a large fig tree stands right next to the road (DL_Sp12, you can see the actual tree on Google Maps...). The tree was fruiting -- we didn't know where to look, new species everywhere (15:05-15:25): **White-cheeked Turaco**, **White-billed Starling**, **Bruce's Green Pigeon**, **Banded Barbet**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher**, **Montane White-eye**, **Baglafecht Weaver** and **African Citril**.

Even though we did not want to visit the monastery itself (DL03), we were still asked to pay the steep entrance fee for entering the grounds. Knowing that we should also be able to elsewhere see the woodland/forest species that are possible here, we decided to turn around (meanwhile seeing **White-backed Tit** near the entrance), and to try some shrubbery a few 100m before the monastery (15:50-16:10). In hindsight this was the wrong decision, since the whole village followed us, making decent birding impossible. We also did not reach any forest this way. We still had **Hemprich's Hornbill**, **Singing Cisticola**, **Yellow-bellied Waxbill**, **Blue-headed Coucal** (song), **Rüppell's Robin-chat** and a **Bearded Vulture**.

Back at the Ethio-German Hotel, we first added a soaring **Greater Spotted Eagle** to the list, oddly enough still a lifer for Rob. With still some time left until dusk, we walked the path to the bridge again (16:20-17:45). Halfway, we heard **Erckel's Francolins** deep down in the valley, and saw one bird very nearby, at the edge of the abyss. Near the bridge, one can overlook a cliff where we found a **Verreaux's Eagle** chick on a nest. Along the stream just south of the bridge, we saw two **Mountain Wagtails** that were quite active and vocal (cool call!). At the Ethio-German Hotel we had our first, and for some of us, last, injera.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Debre Libanos area is a good site:

Portuguese Bridge: *Cape Eagle Owl* (calling at night near the hotel), *Nyanza Swift*, *Black ('Blue') Saw-wing*, *Erlanger's Lark*, *Little Rock Thrush*.

Monastery: *Abyssinian Woodpecker*, *Brown Woodland Warbler*, *Brown Parisoma*, *Abyssinian Oriole*.

4. Jemma Valley [30/1: all day & 31/1: dawn-11h]

30/1:

Jemma Valley is the usual destination after Debre Libanos. One of the main targets here is *Harwood's Francolin*, which is best seen and heard at first light. Therefore, one should leave very early from Debre Libanos. We left at 04:00, arriving at the top of the Jemma Valley at 05:30. During the ride, we had good views of a **Barn Owl** along the road (exact spot unfortunately not recorded), a species that is apparently very rarely seen in Ethiopia.

After getting out of the car at JE03 (05:30-06:20), we soon heard **Harwood's Francolin** calling from down the hill (even though overall, francolin calling activity was very low during our visit, and most of the calls were from Erckel's Francolins). It was not hard to find both **Harwood's** and **Erckel's Francolins** leisurely foraging on the fields below the road, at the indicated GPS point. Despite this, the locals surrounding the car claimed they found it for us, demanding a 500 birr reward. They were quite persistent, so in the end our driver Mesfin deemed it necessary to go all the way back to Lemi Town (JE02) and get the police.

A recent trip report by Lieven de Temmerman (see link in 'Preparation' section) reported Ankober Serin just 1km back (upslope) from the Harwood's spot, where there are cliffs above the road (JE05). Because Mesfin was still on his way getting the police, we walked our way to the point where they had seen it. Unbelievably, only a short search later Sander indeed encountered a group of **Ankober Serins** along the road (x: JE04)! We could all see (and hear, as they were rather vocal) them quite well for a while, flying around and foraging on the cliffs above us, but surprisingly, they then completely disappeared. It was not even 8am, and we had both the francolin and serin in the pocket -- not too bad.

Roadside birding in this area was generally good, with 2 **Little Rock thrushes**, **Rüppell's Black Chat**, **Streaky Seedeater**, 3 **Singing Cisticolas**, **White-billed Starling**, 2 **Slender-billed Starlings** (near a well with wet cliffs along the road), 2 **Blue Rock Thrushes**, 10 **Cinnamon-breasted Buntings**, a female **Klaas's Cuckoo**, **Mountain White-eyes**, and a male

Pallid Harrier.

When Mesfin returned from Lemi Town, we made our descent into the Jemma Valley, stopping halfway at JE06, from where we walked a few km's down the road (08:00-10:00) to a little beyond the cliffs at JE_Sp18 (and passing JE07 where the same Belgians had seen *White-throated Seedeater*). It was quite hot already, so birding was a bit slow, but we had **Abyssinian Wheatear, Familiar Chat, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver, 2-3 Mocking Cliff Chats, White-winged Cliff Chat** (both Cliff Chats at the ...cliffs), **Booted Eagle, Black-chested Snake-Eagle, 3 Singing and 1 Rattling Cisticola, Little Rock Thrush**, and a non-br male **Red-collared Widowbird**.

Further down in the Jemma Valley, we briefly stopped in agricultural land at JE08 (10:10-10:40), where we added 10 **Speckle-fronted Weavers** and 5 **Bush Petronias**. Just before the Jemma Bridge, we walked through a dry river bed at JE09 (11:00-12:10), which was reasonably productive despite the time of day: **Vinaceous Dove** (make sure you know the song!), a probable non-br *Black-winged Red Bishop*, **Black-billed Barbet, Yellow-fronted Canary, 3 Red-billed Queleas, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver, Isabelline Shrike and Namaqua Dove**.

We had lunch at a shady spot on the north side of the Jemma Bridge, and then by foot birded the area near the river (13:00-15:00). We first walked a bit eastwards along the northern shore of the river, near the entrance to the wadi mentioned in Behrens: JE_BeX1. We added species like **Grey-headed Kingfisher, Village Indigobird, Black stork, Woolly-necked Stork** (3, overhead), **Senegal Thick-knee** (on the gravel along the river), **Spur-winged Plover, African Pied Wagtail, Abyssinian White-eye and Familiar Chat**. Among the swallows flying along the river, we found a swallow with a grey rump -- unfortunately it turned out not to be a *Red Sea Cliff Swallow* but merely a **Grey-rumped Swallow** (still a fairly good bird in Ethiopia). Besides some 10 **Greater Blue-eared Starlings**, we also found 5 **Lesser Blue-eared Starlings** - knowing the difference in voice makes the ID easier! We then walked through the wadi (JE_BeX1) to the hills above it (JE_BeX2), which was disappointing. In the wadi, we heard our first **Emerald-spotted Wood Dove**. On the hills, there was no trace of *Foxy Cisticola* (for which this location is highlighted by Behrens) or any other interesting birds. *Foxy Cisticola* turned out to be easy at a few later spots -- so no need to walk there for this species.

The last part of the afternoon was spent along the Lomi River (JE_Sp20, 15:15-16:30), which is, as the crow flies, 6km northeast of the bridge over the Jemma River. We birded the stream on both sides of the road near the bridge. Along the river, just north of the main road, Rob found the much wanted **Red-billed Pytilia** (x: JE10) in a bush; it stayed just long enough for everybody to see it. Unfortunately, we could not find *White-throated Seedeater*. Other species seen included: 15+ **Crimson-rumped Waxbills**, 3+ **Foxy Cisticolas**, 1 **Striped Kingfisher**, 2 **Wire-tailed Swallows**, 2 **Mountain Wagtails**, 10+ **Speckle-fronted Weavers**, 1 **Long-billed Pipit** and 5+ **African Silverbills**. Because we wanted to start our search for *White-throated Seedeater* at this site again the next morning, we asked Mesfin whether we could camp here. He did not like the idea ("too dangerous"), and proposed to go to a hotel in Lemi Town. Since

Lemi was a long drive back, we were not at all keen on going there. So Mesfin came up with a better idea: he asked a nearby farmer, and we were allowed to camp near his house (JE12). This was a very nice experience.

31/1:

In the early morning, we searched extensively for *White-throated Seedeater* along the Lomi River, but again without success (05:30-07:15) However, Jelmer and Bas saw **Red-billed Pytilia** again at the same spot, and we also found 2 **Harwood's Francolins** (x: JE11). Other interesting sightings included an adult **Red-tailed Shrike**, 6 non-br **Northern Red Bishops**, 6 **Foxy Cisticolas**, 4 **Lesser Blue-eared Starlings**, 2 non-br **Pin-tailed Whydahs** and, unexpectedly, 1 **Green-backed Eremomela**, but only by Sjoerd. We were getting a bit nervous now, where was the *White-throated Seedeater*?

We then headed to our last spot for this species, Awar Wuha (JE_Sp21, 07:55-08:50), a bit further northwards from Lomi. Well, we should have checked that spot earlier, since all **White-throated Seedeaters** seemed to have gathered here -- we saw some 15 individuals, and they were impossible to miss! This was a nice spot anyway, many birds were attracted to the green vegetation along the spring that was present here, and we added species like **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, 4 **Black-winged Lovebirds**, an elusive **Cinnamon Bracken Warbler**, our only **Lesser Spotted Eagle**, 8 **Violet-backed Starlings**, **Yellow-fronted Canaries**, a **Pin-tailed Wydah**, **Little Rock Thrush**, 2 **African Grey Hornbills**, 1 **Lesser Honeyguide**, 3 **Mountain Wagtails** and **Crimson-rumped Waxbills**. Heavily relieved that we had seen *White-throated Seedeater* (missing out on endemic species was no option on this trip!), we drove back to the Jemma River, halfway finally finding a nice (and indeed our only) **Fox Kestrel** (x: JE13), another species for which we had looked out for a while. A lunch stop near the Jemma River bridge again produced a **Grey-rumped Swallow**. At 11h, we had left the Jemma Valley, and passed Lemi on our way to Ankober (seeing a pair of **Verreaux's Eagles** east of the T-junction at JE14).

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Jemma Valley is a good site: *Giant Kingfisher*, *Nyanza Swift*, and *Black-winged Red Bishop* (we were pretty certain of one bird, but they are hard in non-br plumage -- though we later got some pretty clear ones in Gibe). This insignificant list means that we did pretty well in the Jemma Valley. There are also a few sightings of *Pale Rock Sparrow* and *Cinereous Bunting*, so these are species to keep an eye out for!

5. Ankober Escarpment [31/01: 14h-15h]

After a 3h drive, we arrived in the eucalyptus forest near Ankober. Having seen *Ankober Serin* in Jemma, the only species we were really looking for in Ankober was *Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk*. It had been reported quite often in and near this eucalyptus forest. But how to quickly target an *Accipiter*? We decided to walk around a little bit along the road at AN02 (14:15-14:30), but to no avail. Because we still wanted to do some birding in Melka Ghebdu for more important species in the late afternoon, we soon decided to drive on. While entering the village

of Ankober, three of us were lucky enough to still see a **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk** flying past (x: [AN03](#)). In the village ([AN04](#)), we first made a reservation at a very basic but friendly hotel, and then drove straight to Melka Ghebdu. The next morning, while driving in the dark to Melka Ghebdu, we flushed a **Montane Nightjar** from the road, just after leaving the village.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Ankober is a good site:

Ankober Serin, Verreaux's Eagle, White-billed Starling, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler, Abyssinian Wheatear. There are also a few sightings of *Mountain Buzzard* and *Moorland Francolin*. We saw all of these species elsewhere.

6. Melka Ghebdu [31/01: 16h-17h30 & 01/02: 05h30-07h]

31/01:

Melka Ghebdu was a 40min drive from Ankober, and we arrived there at 15:55. Our first stop was at [MG_Sp28](#), which should be good for *Yellow-throated Seedeater*. Only minutes after leaving the vehicle, we indeed found a couple of **Yellow-throated Seedeaters** in the ploughed fields left (north) of the road immediately before the river crossing. From here on, we walked eastwards through the river bed for some 500 meters. It didn't take long before we encountered two **Half-collared Kingfishers** (x: [MG01](#)), giving excellent views, but we couldn't find any *Giant Kingfishers* (which we did not see at all this trip!). In trees on the north side of the river, we found a small group of **Eastern Grey Plantain-eaters**, our only sighting of the trip. Another highlight of this productive spot was a **Black Scrub Robin** (also the only one of the trip). The bird was very elusive in the thick bushes surrounding fields on the south side of the river. Other birds seen here included 5 **Yellow-breasted Barbets**, 3 **Abyssinian Wheatears**, 1 **Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike**, 1 **Yellow-fronted Canary**, 1 **Red-faced Crombec**, and 1 **Collared Sunbird**. According to the range maps, the latter should not occur this far north in the country, but we are certain that we saw one, and not a *Variable* (other trip reports have also reported them north of the indicated range). Returning to the road at 17:30, we had brief views of **Crested Francolins**.

01/02:

The main target for this morning was *Clapperton's Francolin*. It was very quiet at [MG_Sp28](#), so we soon moved on to [MG02](#) (05:55-06:35), where bird activity was much higher: 2 **Yellow-throated Seedeaters** (x: [MG03](#)), 2 **Reichenow's Seedeaters**, 1 **White-browed Scrub Robin**, 20+ **Crimson-rumped Waxbills** and 3 **Rufous Chatterers**. We also heard francolins calling on the slopes south of the road, both **Crested** and **Clapperton's Francolins** (x: [MG02](#)). But despite some searching, we could not obtain views of the *Clapperton's* (fortunately, we would later see them multiple times elsewhere). After a short breakfast-break near [MG_BeC](#) (our first **White-browed Sparrow-Weavers** and a **Gabar Goshawk**), we drove onto the Afar plains.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Melka Ghebdu is a good site:

Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver, Giant Kingfisher, Bare-faced Go-away Bird, Long-billed Pipit, Ruppel's Black Chat. We never connected with *Giant Kingfisher*, but all other species were seen elsewhere.

7. Afar plains (Melka Ghebdu to Awash) [01/02: 07h30-14h]

The road from Melka Ghebdu to our first stop on the Afar plains (AF02) is slow and rough (07:25-08:30), but the area is desolate in a pretty way. This stop was a bit disappointing (08:30-09:25; the place is mentioned in Behrens as site A for Afar, but our AF02 coordinates are more precise). We could not find the goodies mentioned in Behrens, such as *White-faced Owl* and *African Collared Dove*, but did have great views of **Pearl-spotted Owlet** and **Nubian Woodpecker**. Driving on, we had our first sightings of **Arabian** and **Kori Bustards**, and, very surprisingly, two males **Common Ostrich** (at x: AF03 and x: AF06). These are not mentioned for the Afar Plains in any source, but after consulting several people, they are most likely genuine, wild, birds.

Near a small settlement (at x: AF04), we were relieved to find 3 **African Collared Doves**, our only sighting of the trip. Our next stop was AF05 (11:20-12:20), where we birded a more wooded area, with lots of cattle tracks. Here we found **Pearl-spotted Owlet** again (attracted to our tape that was actually meant to lure in passerines), and also saw **Masked Shrike**, 3 **African Palm Swifts**, 4-5 **Northern White-crowned Shrikes**, 2+ **White-rumped Babblers**, 2-3 **White-browed Coucals**, and **Common Bulbuls** (with no phenotypic signs of *Somali* influences).

We reached the main road (that runs from Addis to Awash) at 14:05, quite a bit earlier than we had expected. This means we had spent only 6h40min between Melka Ghedbu and the main road, of which a little over 4h was net driving time.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Afar Plains are a good site: *White-faced Owl, Nile Valley Sunbird, Somali Bulbul* (but note that we did see bulbuls, and they looked like Common Bulbuls! Also see Bilen account), and more rarely: *Black-headed Lapwing* and *Desert Lark*. *Nile Valley Sunbird* was later easily seen at Awash and Bilen.

8. Awash NP & Lake Besaka [01/02: 14h-dusk & 02/02: all day & 03/02: 15h-dusk]

01/02:

Coming from the Afar Plains in the afternoon, we had some time to explore the Besaka lava fields for *Sombre Rock Chat* and associated by-catch (14:10-15:40). We stopped at AS_Sp40, and first explored the lava fields south of the highway. Walking on lava fields is not always easy, and we could only find some **Blackstarts** on this section. We then crossed the highway, and tried the lava fields on the northern side, with a broad, straight track running through it. From the track, we heard and briefly saw a **Striolated Bunting**. It took a while, but Sander finally also found a **Sombre Rock Chat**, at x: AS01, which is east of the track and north of the highway. It often sat in a small tree on the lava field, at times accompanied by a **Blackstart**, which allowed

for excellent comparison!

From here, it is only a short drive to the entrance of the National Park. We paid the entrance fee for three days, and drove straight to the Awash Falls Lodge ([AS07](#)). After pitching our tents at their campsite, we still had some time until dark, which we spent birding by foot near the lodge (16:40-17:40). **Wahlberg's Honeyguide** (x: [AS08](#)) was an unexpected highlight, while some **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouses** flew by at dusk. Unfortunately, it was too dark to identify a *nightjar* sp. that was flying around at the gate of the lodge.

02/02:

We started driving through the park at dawn, and first of all saw two *Spotted Hyenas* and a *Bat-eared Fox*. This morning, we did the loop through the park counter-clockwise and then back-and-forth a bit. Our first stop was in some open woodland at [AS09](#) (05:50-06:15). One of the targets was easily found: two males in breeding plumage as well as a female **Nile Valley Sunbird** -- really nice birds! While the other target, *Gillett's Lark*, could not be found, we did also see a few **Ashy Cisticolas**, **Grey-headed Batis** (singing), 5+ **Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes**, **Red-tailed Shrike**, 1 **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, 2 **Plain-backed Pipits**, 1 **Red-and-yellow Barbet**, several **African Palm Swifts**, 2 **Buff-crested Bustards** and 10+ **Mouse-coloured Penduline-tits**. In between driving around and birding from the car, we walked through similar habitat in the northern part of the loop (07:50-08:20 and 09:55-10:20, just west and east of [AS11](#), respectively), but again no *Gillet's*, and also no *Red-winged Lark*. We also looked for *White-faced Owl* at [AS_Sp33](#), but could not find it.

Walking around in the area at the park entrance (08:40-09:20) produced 4 **Nile Valley Sunbirds**, 1 male **Little Weaver**, 1 **Black-chested Snake Eagle**, 1 **Buff-crested Bustard** and 2 **Abyssinian Ground Hornbills**.

Northwards from the T-junction (with the track to the Kereyou Lodge) at [AS_BeC](#), the plains are more open. We soon saw our first bustard here, a **Kori Bustard**, and five more individuals would follow on this stretch (a: [AS10](#)). **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** was abundant, with some 200 individuals, mainly flying by. We also easily found a few **Arabian Bustards**, but *Hartlaub's* was more difficult to get. We tried the track mentioned in Behrens that heads northeast from [AS_BeB](#) (10:25-12:00). Here, some areas with higher grass can be found, and we were very happy to finally see a **Hartlaub's Bustard** (the only one of the trip), a superb male at x: [AS12](#). At this spot we also walked around on the plains hoping to find *Desert Cisticola*, but could only find **Zitting Cisticola**. This track also produced our only and highly welcomed **Scissor-tailed Kite** (x: [AS14](#)), soaring above us for a while. Other species seen on the open plains this morning: 10-15 **Singing Bush Larks** (mainly flushed by walking on the plains), 1 imm **Lappet-faced Vulture** (x: [AS13](#)), 5 **Ashy Cisticolas**, 1 female **Bateleur**, 1 **White-browed Scrub Robin**, 1 **Rattling Cisticola**, 1 **Martial Eagle**, both **Red-tailed** and **Isabelline Shrike** and 2 **Steppe Grey Shrikes**.

We had lunch at the Kereyou Lodge ([AS_Sp35](#), 12:20-13:15). It is no longer possible to stay overnight at the lodge, but the restaurant is still running, and food is served with great views

of the canyon. Two distant starlings down in the canyon were identified as **Bristle-crowned Starlings**. While driving back from the lodge to the loop, Jelmer found 3 **Three-banded Coursers** (x: AS15) in the shade under a bush -- one of the highlights of the day.

In the afternoon we drove the entire loop again until dusk, stopping and walking around in both bushy and open habitat, hoping for some new birds, especially *Red-winged Lark*, *Desert Cisticola*, or *Secretary Bird*, but could not find any. We did find two odd-looking *Gillett's Larks* (at x: AS11): they seemed to have red primaries, which doesn't fit this species. But they were clearly not *Red-wingeds* either, based on e.g. size and head pattern. A little confused, we still identified them as *Gillett's* for the time being -- back home, after checking the pictures and consulting Ken Behrens and Christian Boix, it became clear that these birds had been **Foxy Larks**. These had in fact not been recorded in Awash before. In hindsight we were also rather happy that we did see *Gillett's Lark* in Bogol Manyo!

03/02:

The morning was spent at the Ali Dege Plains and Bilen Lodge area, see that section.

After a long lunch in Awash Town, we spent the remaining part of the afternoon (14:50 - dusk) in Awash NP, mainly in an unsuccessful search for the earlier mentioned species that we were still missing. We did see a pair of **Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs** in breeding plumage near AS Sp34, two males **Pallid Harrier**, a male **Buff-crested Bustard** as well as many **Tawny Pipits** and **Somali Fiscals**. The last few hours of daylight were spent around the airstrip (AS17): 4 **Purple Grenadiers**, 1 **Somali Bunting**, 4 **Green-winged Pytilias** and 4 **Yellow-spotted Petronias**.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Awash is a good site:

Red-winged Lark, *Secretary Bird*, *Star-spotted Nightjar*, *White-faced Owl*, *Gillet's Lark*, *Desert Cisticola*, *White-bellied Canary*, *White-bellied Bustard*, *Red-fronted Warbler*, *Bearded Woodpecker*, *Eastern Grey Plantain-eater*, *Black Scrub-robin*, and *Chestnut-headed Sparrowlark*. So we missed quite a few birds, though none of them very important or attractive (and only the first four we never connected with). Birding here was not very entertaining for us, as the area was very dry, and bird activity very low. A few species that are more rarely seen here include *Double-banded Courser*, *Black-headed Lapwing*, and *Straw-tailed Whydah*.

9. Ali Dege Plains and Bilen Lodge area [03/02: 06-11h]

From 04:45-05:50, we drove from Awash to the Ali Dege Plains. While we had planned AL Sp45 as a stop, Mesfin said he knew where to best look for *Somali Ostrich*, and drove us to AL01 (05:50-07:05). Here we scanned the plains east of the road, and indeed, **Somali Ostrich** was easily found. From that point, a track goes on to the plains from the main road, but because of a tribal border conflict, Mesfin didn't want to drive in. So we simply walked the first 500 meters of the track (we promised Mesfin not to go too far). A very pleasant surprise was the fact that **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks** appeared to be abundant on the plains -- we saw 100s of

them! Another highlight was 100+ **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse**, some of which gave great views. Other species seen included >6 **Lanner Falcons**, 1 male **Green-winged Pytilia**, 50+ **Red-billed Queleas**, 1 **Arabian Bustard**, and 1 **Greater Short-toed Lark** (among the *Sparrow-larks*, picked up by call).

On the way back, we didn't stop at AL_Sp45, as this was rather close to a small settlement, and Mesfin did not feel secure about it. In safer times, it is apparently also possible to drive onto the plains there, to AL02 and AL03, where Swedish trips had e.g. seen *Double-banded Courser*. Unfortunately, no courser for us!

The next destination was Bilen Lodge, so we drove ca 7 km back along the main road, and then took the track to Bilen Lodge at BI_Sp42. We drove the first few km's slowly, and saw 3 **Northern Yellow-billed Hornbills**, 1 **Cardinal Woodpecker** and our first **White-bellied Bustards** (a pair) from the car. We stopped at BI02 (07:35-08:05), and walked around at both sides of the road. **Nile Valley Sunbird** was common here, with more than 10 individuals, and we also saw **Shining** and **Scarlet-chested Sunbird**. **Slate-coloured Boubou** and **Black-throated Barbet** were new for the trip, some 65 **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** flew past, and another **Arabian Bustard** was seen.

We then stopped BI03 (08:15-08:30). This spot is not far from the lodge itself, and has more open habitat. Here, too, **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark** was abundant, with over 200 birds in several groups (and again, **Short-toed Larks** mixed in). Bas briefly saw a properly looking **Somali Bulbul**, and Sander had a male **Desert Wheatear** (a vagrant). Other species seen here: 8 **African Silverbills**, 1 **Red-fronted Warbler**, **Black-throated Barbets** and many **Namaqua Doves**.

We then went to the lodge itself (at BI05; the GPS point in Spottiswoode at BI_Sp43 seems a bit off; 08:40-11:10), where we first had a soda in the shade. After the refreshment, we spread out and searched stony areas around the lodge for **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse**. It took a while, but we eventually stumbled upon 4 individuals (at x: BI06; 2 males and 2 females). They are perfectly camouflaged, and they trust on that feat, so we could observe them at close distance for a long time -- certainly one of the highlights of the trip. Another target was *Somali Bulbul*, but all individuals seen around the lodge showed intermediate features between *Common* and *Somali Bulbul*. All other trip reports simply mention *Somali Bulbul* here; are they ticking intergrades, or were we just unlucky in not seeing proper *Somalis*? From the lodge, a distant marsh can be scanned, which resulted in 2 distant **Saddle-billed Storks**. Birding around the lodge also produced **Yellow-breasted barbets**, 1 **Ethiopian Swallow**, 2 **Wire-tailed Swallows**, 5 **Northern Red Bishops**, **Nile Valley** and **Shining Sunbirds**, 1 **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**, ca 10 **Wattled Starlings** and a few **Grey Wren-Warblers**. It was lunch time now, but the lodge is a little bit very much expensive, so we left the area (flushing a nice **Slender-tailed Nightjar** at the edge of the parking lot) and had a late lunch in Awash Town, on the way back to Awash NP.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Ali Dege Plains and Bilen are good sites:

Somali Bulbul, Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Lark, Black Scrub Robin, Spotted Thick-knee.

More rarely seen species include *Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Grasshopper Buzzard, Pale Rock Sparrow, Menetries Warbler, Four-banded and Yellow-throated Sandgrouse.*

With respect to *Somali Bulbul*: we suspect that the local population is part a intergradation/ hybrid zone. This means that a lot of plumage variation can probably be found, which leaves some room to opportunistically tick the species anyway.

10. Wondo Genet [04/02 12h - dusk & 05/02 dawn - 7h]

We arrived at Wondo Genet at 12:15. Mesfin had phoned ahead to the allegedly best bird guide of Wondo Genet (his name is Nuru or something very similar), so we could go birding with him immediately. Nuru turned out to be a very good guide indeed. He does not come across as enthusiastic at all, but he knows every bird call and finds all the birds, without binoculars. Many reports claim that nearly all forest is gone and that the place is very degraded. Unfortunately this is true indeed, and the place itself is very depressing. The small tracks are packed with little kids carrying wood on their backs. The forest is clearly shrinking: where the real forest was supposed to start only a few years ago, according to trip reports, we were still walking in an area with scattered large trees. Nonetheless, already in those areas, forest species do appear, but it feels like this will not last for long.

While pitching our tents in the Wabe Shebelle Hotel ([WO03](#)) gardens, we found 5+ **Black-and-white Mannikins** in a palm tree, our only sighting of the trip. At the entrance of the hotel we met Nuru, and first we made a short stroll on the hotel grounds for *Olive Sunbird*, but no luck. From here we went into the 'forest' and visited most spots mentioned in the Spottiswoode and Behrens guides. Nuru knows a spot for each of the target species, so we saw nearly all specialties that afternoon: **African Olive Pigeon** (drinking from a ditch at the edge of the village), **Black Saw-wing** (very common), **Green-backed Honeybird** (x: [WO06](#)), 2 females and 1 male **Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrike**, 1 **Long-crested Eagle**, 2 **Tambourine Doves** (took a while before everyone saw it in the understory), 2 **Lemon Doves**, 1 **Broad-billed Roller** (x: [WO12](#)), **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill** (common), 1 male **Abyssinian Woodpecker** (x: [WO10](#)), 1 **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** (x: [WO13](#)), 2 **African Hill Babblers** (x: [WO08](#)), 3 **Spotted Creepers** (nice birds! At x: [WO07](#)), 2 **Slender-billed Starlings**, 2 **Sharpe's Starlings** (x: [WO11](#)), an unexpected group of 50 **Grosbeak Weavers** (our only of the trip!) and 2 **African Firefinches**. **African Crowned Eagle** had a nest in the forest, we saw the chick in the nest, and the parents were also around, giving a nice flight show (x: [WO09](#)). We ended the walk near the hotel at the **Yellow-fronted Parrot** roost (x: [WO14](#)). It took a while, and some of us became nervous, but in the end, at 18:35, two birds flew in giving good views.

The next morning, we met up with Nuru early. While leaving the hotel grounds in the dark, Nuru heard **African Goshawk** at the entrance (x: [WO21](#)), and after waiting for some more light, we indeed saw two of them. After this minor delay we headed towards the *Scaly Francolin* spot. After another minor delay (a gorgeous **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** at x: [WO15](#)), we arrived at the spot and soon heard **Scaly Francolins** calling. With some patience we eventually all

had reasonable views as well, at x: WO16. In this area we also had good views of **African Firefinches** (x: WO17) and a pair of **Abyssinian Woodpeckers** (x: WO18), **Spectacled Weaver** and **Red-faced Cisticola**, and Jelmer had 2 **Common Waxbills**. On the way back, Nuru heard **African Emerald Cuckoo** (x: WO19), and sure enough, after he whistled it in, we had great views -- how iridescently green can a bird be, fabulous! Back at the hotel we had a few **Mountain Wagtails**. The only (minor) target we were then still missing was *Grey Cuckooshrike*, so we figured that we should move on, with a long drive to Dinsho still ahead. We drove away at 07:30.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Wondo Genet is a good site:

Great Sparrowhawk, Half-collared Kingfisher (stream at WO20), *Grey Cuckoo-shrike, Brown Parisoma, Red-winged Starling, Olive Sunbird, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird*. All these species except the cuckoo-shrike were seen elsewhere.

11. Bale Mountains: Dinsho area [05/02 10h - dusk]

Make sure to leave Wondo Genet in time, as it is a long drive to the Bale Mountains (almost three hours to the first stop at BD_Sp64, then another two hours to the *Cape Eagle Owl* site, which is close to the HQ). When we were there, only the first part of the road was paved, until BD02, but this should improve in the near future. Our first stop was at BD_Sp64 (10:20-10:35), where we walked a bit along the stream, south of the road. A few very persistent kids didn't make it a very pleasant stop, but 3 **Grey-rumped Swallows** flew over the fields, and **African Black Duck** was present in the stream.

Further along the main road, at the pass at 3600m, we saw groups of **Red-billed Choughs** (x: BD04). At the well known Cape Eagle-Owl spot (BD_Sp67; 12:45-13:15), we stopped to check the cliff, and were immediately asked for entrance by the local road workers. We politely refused. We checked the cliff and indeed found the roosting **Cape Eagle-Owl**, also seeing 8 **Common Waxbills** and 2 **Ethiopian Cisticolas**.

Next stop was the pool at BD_Sp68 (13:25-13:45). We should have seen *Rouget's Rail* already before this pool, strolling confidently near or on the road, but we didn't. We also initially did not find it at the pool, so we became a bit nervous: is the rumour true that Chinese road workers are eating all the rails? Anyway, just before we wanted to leave we did see one **Rouget's Rail** appearing from the vegetation along the pool. We also flushed two snipes from the lakeside, which we at least initially thought looked more like *Common* than *African Snipes* -- but also see the Sanetti account, the species may be less easy to separate than the drawings in the *Birds of HoA* suggest. The lake was also good for 26 **Spot-breasted Plovers**, 15 **Yellow-billed Ducks**, 10 **Blue-winged Goose**, 1 **Steppe Eagle**, 1 **Lappet-faced Vulture**, 2 **Abyssinian Longclaws** and 10 **Red-knobbed Coots**.

A stop at BD_Sp69 (14:00-14:10) was disappointing, the only bird was a single **Rouget's Rail**. At ca 14:30 we arrived at the entrance of the National Park (BD_Sp71). While paying

for permissions for the coming days in the National Park, we heard a **Cinnamon Bracken Warbler** singing at the entrance. On the way back, we stopped here again, and taped the bird out. From the entrance it is ca 1km to the park headquarters ([BD06](#)). Here, we met the local bird guide who knows the roosting spot of *Abyssinian Long-eared Owl*; his services cost a whopping 450 birr these days. Only a short walk and a few minutes later, we were looking at a roosting **Abyssinian Long-eared Owl** in a pine (x: [BD07](#)). From here, we did some birding with the guide in the vicinity of the HQ. The guide does not know many birds, and the area was very quiet, but we heard 2 **Abyssinian Catbirds**, saw 7 **White-Backed Black Tits** and 6 **Red-winged Starlings**. We ended the walk at the roosting spot of **African Wood Owl** (x: [BD09](#)), where two owls gave good views.

For us it was then time to find a place for the night, and on the way to Goba we saw 2 **Rouget's Rails**, an **African Stonechat** and the first **Dark-capped Bulbuls**. In Goba, we had some problems finding accommodation: the Wabe Shebelle Hotel was fully booked, and camping on their grounds costed a hefty 810 birr per very cold night! But we had little choice, and all was suddenly well when, while pitching our tent at dusk, we saw a **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl** on a lamp post! One of the most unexpected sightings of the trip (they are not known from such high altitudes).

Species that we did not see here, but for which Dinsho is a good site:

Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, African Snipe, Montane Nightjar, Abyssinian Woodpecker, Red-chested Swallow, Abyssinian Ground Thrush, Yellow-crowned Canary. All these species except the swallow were seen elsewhere.

12. Bale Mountains: Sanetti Plateau [06/02: dawn - 13h]

Our departure point for the day was Goba. The night before, we had had telephone contact with a Swiss group that had been to the Sanetti Plateau the previous day. They had some bad news: they had seen very few birds in general (presumably due to the drought), with no *Wattled Crane*, only one *Chestnut-naped Francolin* and not a single *Moorland Francolin*!

Our first stop was [BS_Sp73](#) (06:30-07:10), where we walked the fields west of the road. It didn't take long before we found an elusive **Chestnut-naped Francolin** (x: [BS02](#)), and another target was found soon after: **Brown ('Bale') Parisoma** (x: [BS03](#)). Time to move on to the more open plateau. The first stop ([BS04](#)) was good for 11 **Chestnut-naped Francolins** and 1 **Rouget's Rail**. Seeing so many *Chestnut-naped*s was heartening, so our hopes for *Moorland* were up again. Yet the next stop ([BS06](#)) produced a similar result: **Chestnut-naped Francolins** and **Rouget's Rail**, but no *Moorland Francolin*. How would we be able to find this species?

We decided to take a longer walk, near [BS_BeF](#) (08:30-10:35). This is just before one reaches the plateau proper, and where a lot of very low bushes are still present (which should be good for the francolin). We spread and searched extensively, but again saw only **Chestnut-naped Francolins**. We ended up at a pool ([BS07](#)), where we saw **Rouget's Rail** and nearby we

flushed a **Cape Eagle-Owl**. On the way back to the car Sander finally flushed 2 **Moorland Francolins** (x: BS08), but frustratingly enough they flew into the valley, and the rest missed them. Nobody really cared about the two **Crag Martins** (*Rock Martin* carefully excluded) and the **Cinnamon Bracken Warbler** that we saw here as well.

After lunch and a final attempt for the francolin, we went to BS09 (10:40-11:15), which is at the start of the plateau proper, with very little vegetation apart from low grasses. We flushed a few *snipes* here which we initially felt had to be *Common* once again, but after scrutinizing the pictures and consulting some other people, these were **African Snipes** after all. But beware, they are not as dark and don't have as much white on the tail as illustrated in the *Birds of HoA*! Along the pool, we also finally flushed 2 **Moorland Francolins**, and with some luck (we were rather spread out..), everyone had good views as they flew down into a valley. Because of the unusually extensive searching that had proved to be necessary for *Moorland Francolin* (most trips see it fairly easily), it was almost noon already. Unsurprisingly, we could not find *Wattled Crane* on the plateau -- it is known that in dry years, the cranes leave the plateau by January or so. Fortunately we had a good back-up place for this goody: Lake Bojo.

The last part of the plateau (11:15-12:45) was a bit disappointing as well: 2 **Ruddy Shelducks** (x: BS12), 1 distant *Ethiopian Wolf*, 4 **Steppe Eagles** (usually many more are seen here!) and 10 **Red-billed Choughs**. Presumably we only saw one instead of many wolves because it was already afternoon at this point.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Sanetti Plateau is a good site: *Wattled Crane*, *Golden Eagle*, *Mountain Buzzard*, *Spot-breasted Lapwing*, and more rarely, *Malachite Sunbird*. We did not see the eagle and the sunbird elsewhere on this trip either.

13. Bale Mountains: Harenna Forest [06/02: 14h-dusk & 07/02: dawn-11h]

Many people bird Harenna for a few hours only, but we were happy to take a bit more time for this excellent forest. Whether you see all the goodies or not, this place is just very nice. We arrived at Katcha Camp (BH_Sp76) at 14:15. This is basically a small field next to a stream. You need permission to stay there, which has to be arranged at the entrance of the NP at Dinsho. After pitching our tents, we took a walk around the campsite (15:00-17:15). First, we walked to the main road (BH_Sp78), then we followed the road to the north for ca 1km (BH_BeL). At the latter spot, a stream runs parallel to the road just east of it. Several small footpaths along the stream eventually bring you back to the campsite, which is situated along the same stream. Bird activity was once again fairly low, but a few hours of intensive birding still resulted in 2 singing **Red-chested Cuckoos**, 1 heard-only **Emerald Cuckoo**, 1 singing **Brown Woodland Warbler**, ca 10 **Abyssinian Catbirds**, 5+ **Cinnamon Bracken Warblers**, 15 **White Cheeked Turacos**, 2 **Abyssinian Ground Thrushes** (at BH_BeL), 2 **Lesser Honeyguides**, 1 female **Abyssinian Woodpecker** (at BH_BeL), 2 **African Hill Babblers**, 2 **Yellow-crowned Canaries**, 1 **African Olive Pigeon**, 1 **Tambourine Dove**, 20 fly-by **Red-winged Starlings**, 1 **Abyssinian Oriole** and 1 **Mountain Buzzard** (soaring, the only one of the trip). Back at

the campsite, a **Montane Nightjar** was briefly calling at dusk. One of the targets here was *Abyssinian Crimsonwing*, but despite intensive searching we could not find it.

After a cold night, we started the next day with pretty much the same walk as yesterday, but we first walked a bit further up the main road, to BH02 (05:30-09:00). Much of the same species as yesterday, but generally higher numbers, and also 1 **Greater Sparrowhawk**, 5+ **Ruppell's Robin-Chat**, 3 **Thick-billed Raven**, 1 **Verreaux's Eagle** and, finally, 2 **Olive Sunbirds** (x: BH03). Yet still no trace of *Abyssinian Crimsonwing*. After a late breakfast, we packed our tents and stopped a few more times on the way down. First, some 1.5 km down the road, at BH04, we walked the road further down for a km or so (10:00-10:20), producing 4 **Abyssinian Woodpeckers**, 10+ **Yellow-bellied Waxbills** and a **Red-chested Cuckoo**. At x: BH05, we had a flying **Crowned Eagle**. Our last stop before leaving Hareenna forest was at a bridge at BH06 (10:30-11:00). This was truly a very nice spot, and it was unfortunate that we were running out of time, so we stopped for only 15 minutes here (take some more time here if you have it!). We saw a **Little Sparrowhawk**, **African Hill Babbler** and a **Narina Trogon**.

After driving out of the forest (the end of the forest is approximately at BH08), the first village you encounter is Dola-Mena. While doing some shopping here, an **Ayres's Hawk-Eagle** was soaring right above the town center.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Hareenna Forest is a good site:
Abyssinian Crimsonwing, *Black-and-White Mannikin*, *Sharpe's Starling*, and *Grey Cuckoo-shrike*. We saw the mannikin and starling at Wondo Genet, but missed out on the others.

14. Genale River area [07/02: 14-16h]

On the way from Hareenna forest to the Genale River area, we saw a flock of swifts at GE01. Most of them were **Mottled Swifts**, mixed in with at least a few **Alpine Swifts**. The Genale River area has only one major target: the *Prince Ruspoli's Turaco*. Our first stop to connect with the species was at GE_BeE (14:00-15:10). We explored the east side of the road, found some fruiting fig trees, but no turacos. We did see a **Wahlberg's Eagle** here, and a female **Black Cuckooshrike** was also a welcome tick. Other sightings included 30 **White-crested Helmet-shrikes**, 2 **Northern Brownbuls** (x: GE03), 5 **White-rumped Babblers**, two probable *Black-headed Batises* (didn't call...), and 5 **Black-headed Orioles**.

But we were running out time, as it is a long drive to Negele, and Mesfin became a bit nervous.

Next stop for the turaco was GE_BeD. Here we were soon surrounded by local kids offering help for the turaco. With little time on our hands, we opted for the easy way and agreed on 100 birr for finding the turaco -- the kids started to spread out along the river. After some fifteen minutes, one of them came running in with the news that he had found them. Two **Prince Ruspoli's Turacos** sat in a fig tree at x: GE04, some 0.5km west of the road. Here we also saw an unexpected male breeding plumage **Yellow-shouldered Whydah** (flying by), 2 **Abyssinian Ground-hornbills**, 1 **Pearl-spotted Owlet**, and 1 **Crimson-rumped Waxbill**.

By then it was 16:15, and our driver was in a hurry: he wanted to be in Negele before dark since the road there is in a bad condition. During the drive we still managed to see **Crested Francolin**, **Shelley's Starling**, **Golden-breasted Starling**, **Rufous-crowned Roller** and **Black-billed Wood-hoopoe**. We stayed at the Nile Hotel, in the middle of town, which was quite good.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Genale River area is a good site: Near the bridge over the Genale River (at [GE06](#)), *Juba Weaver* has been seen.

15. Liben Plains [08/02: dawn-9h & 10/02: 15-17h]

08/02:

We were at the Liben Plains at first light. Only one bird is really important here, the **Sidamo Lark**, so we started at the enclosure that has been made for this critically endangered species. The enclosure is a small "fenced" part of the plain to avoid overgrazing. The fence merely consisted of thorn bushes though, and was clearly being violated regularly. Grass inside the enclosure was only marginally higher than around it. We did not walk in the enclosure itself, but found the lark quickly and easily in the fragments of higher grass directly southeast of the enclosure (x: [LI04](#)). A few 100m further east (x: [LI05](#)) we found them as well; in total we saw 4 individuals.

Somali Short-toed Lark should be common on the plains, but we only saw exactly one individual! (We were warned about this, though, by a Swiss group we had spoken to. They had been here a few days earlier, and had not seen a single one. Probably an effect of the drought once again...). This was at [LI04](#), and it stayed just long enough for everybody to see it. Later we heard that the agricultural fields north of the road may be a better spot. While scanning the plains from this area, we also found the hoped for **Temminck's Courser** (x: [LI09](#)) -- they were in fact hard to miss, as there were no less than eight of them! Among these coursers we also found five **Caspian Plovers**, including two males partly in summer plumage. Other species seen amongst these goodies: 1 **Short-toed Snake-Eagle**, 2 **Black-chested Snake-Eagles**, 1 **Shelley's Rufous Sparrow**, **Plain Backed Pipit** (very common), 3 **Ethiopian Swallows** and 3 **Pectoral-patch Cisticolas**.

In the village 5 km to the east (spot D in Behrens), we had hoped to get better views of **Shelley's Rufous Sparrow**, but couldn't find them. A bit further, at x: [LI10](#), we did find 8 of them, although they were quite shy. Here we also had 3 **Kori Bustards**. Further east, the plains give way to a more savannah-like landscape. We stopped and walked around at [LI11](#) (7:15-7:40), but it was hot already, and very quiet. A roadside walk 3 km further east gave the same impression, and produced little of interest besides a pair of **African Hawk-Eagles**. It was then time to continue further east to the Filtu area.

10/02:

Unexpectedly, we found ourselves on the Liben Plains again just two days later. Bas was treated in the hospital of Negele, so the rest of us spent the last few hours of the day near the plains at spot LI_Sp87 (15:40-17:10). This proved to be a very good site, although it did not produce any lifers. Not many old fig trees here, in fact just some scrub, but as promised in the Spottiswoode guide, we still found a **Prince Ruspoli's Turaco** (x: LI02). Five **Reichenow's Seedeaters** made our heart beats faster, but no *Salvadori's* in the group (they are sometimes seen at the Liben Plains, so keep an eye open). Other birds included 5 **Ethiopian Swallows**, 1 **African Spoonbill**, 1 **Isabelline Shrike**, 3 **Black-headed Batis** (song), 2 **Rattling Cisticola**, 2 **Wattled Lapwing** and 2 **Northern Brownbuls**.

The next morning, while waiting in the dark for our driver in front of our hotel in Negele, we heard a **Freckled Nightjar** calling.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Liben Plains are a good site:
Coqui Francolin, *Red-and-Yellow Barbet*, *Tiny* and *Boran Cisticola*. We would later see the barbet and Tiny Cisticola in the Yabello area.

16. Filtu area [08/02: 10h-dusk & 09/02: dawn-10h]

08/02:

At LI_BeF, between Negele and Filtu, we birded the area south of the road (09:50-11:20). Overall it was rather quiet, until we bumped into a nice feeding flock: 1 male **Banded Parisoma**, 1 **Three-streaked Tchagra**, 10 **Black-cheeked Waxbills**, 3 **Rosy-patched Bushshrikes**, 5 **Northern Black Tits**, 2 **Purple Grenadiers**, 5+ **Somali Crombecs**, 1 **Red-fronted Warbler**, 5 **Pygmy Batis** and 4 **Somali Buntings**.

Continuing towards Filtu, we saw 2 **Lappet-faced Vultures**, 5+ **Lilac-breasted Rollers** 2 **Rufous-crowned Rollers**, 1 **Isabelline Shrike** and 1 **Red-tailed Shrike**. Another stop and walk (FI02, 12:00-13:30) produced many of the same species, but also a male **Marico Sunbird**, 2 **Yellow-spotted Petronias**, ca. 5 **Abyssinian Scimitarbills**, a pair of **Pringle's Puffbacks**, a **Buff-crested Bustard**, and an **Upcher's Warbler**. In Filtu town (FI03) we checked in at a very basic hotel, had a coke, and then spent the last hours of the day at FI_BeB (16:00-17:30). This spot should host *Salvadori's Serin*, a major target for us because we had skipped Sof Omar. Increasingly nervously, we birded the area until dusk, but no sign of the *Salvadori's*. We had 3 **Buff-crested Bustards**, 1 singing **Reichenow's Seedeater**, 2 **Golden-breasted Starlings** and a **Pringle's Puffback**.

09/02:

Early the next morning, we were at FI_BeB again, with only one mission: *Salvadori's Serin* (06:00-08:00). Much the same as yesterday, including most species typical for this habitat... except for the target (in general, though, there was a lack of finches and seedeaters. This might make sense: we did not see any water here, and these birds have to drink often). It slowly became clear that we had to go for plan C for seeing this species (i.e. Arero Forest). A small consolation was that Rob flushed a **Donaldson Smith's Nightjar** (x: FI04) that gave great

views.

We continued in the direction of Bogol Manyo and stopped at FI05, to do some birding along the road (08:45-08:55). It is very hot here during the day, and there was little activity. A **Red-naped Bushshrike** was the highlight.

On the way back from Bogol Manyo to Negele we crossed the Filtu area again, and saw 2 **White-bellied Bustards** at FI01.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Filtu area is a good site:

Gillet's Lark, *Hunter's Sunbird*, *Salvadori's Serin*, *Grosbeak Canary*. We saw all these species elsewhere.

17. Bogol Manyo area [09/02: 12h-dusk]

09/02:

We arrived in Bogol Manyo town at 12:15. On the way there, we had seen three **Somali Coursers** directly along the road at x: BO01. While having a coke in town, we had a look at the local sparrows. They did not look too good for *Parrot-billed Sparrows*, even though only this species (and not **Swainson's Sparrow**) should occur here according to the literature. Having asked around a bit after the trip, it appears that the (distributional) situation with *Parrot-billed Sparrow* is actually quite unclear.

We then went to the police station to negotiate access to area. After a while, we got permission to bird the region with a guard, although they did not want us to go too far down the road towards Somalia (perhaps not as far as we had wanted to go for the *Somali Wheatear*, but this never actually became clear, as we did not bird here the next day). They also gave us permission to stay in the hospital coming nights. The hospital consists of a few small buildings with one doctor and one guard, but no patients. The building has sockets and taps, but there is no water and electricity in Bogol Manyo... weird situation. Anyway, a good hospital would have been nice, because since lunch time, Bas didn't feel good at all (head swellings). He stayed in the hospital, while the rest of us made a short excursion just east of Bogol Manyo.

We birded along the river south of the road at BO_Sp9 (14:50-15:40). There was no running water in the river, only some remaining pools. These attracted good numbers of **Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Larks**. Other birds included two **Golden-breasted Starlings** and a pair of **Violet-backed Sunbirds**.

Four km further east (at BO_BeB, 15:50-16:45), we birded the area north of the road. Soon we found a **Gillett's Lark**. *Gillet's Larks* at this site have previously been known as a separate species ("*Degodi Lark*"), but after careful study, they apparently don't even deserve subspecies status (this was in fact our sole sighting of *Gillett's Lark*, with our Awash birds later turning out to have been *Foxy Larks*!). Other highlights included two **Yellow-vented Eremomelas** (only sighting of the trip, also a bit of a Bogol specialty, although sometimes seen in the Yabello

area), an **Orange-bellied Parrot**, **Green-winged Pytilia**, several groups of **Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Larks**, two **Buff-crested Bustards**, and last but not least a beautiful male **Black-faced Sandgrouse** that sat on the sand right in front of us. It is unsafe here at night, so we had to return to Bogol Manyo before dark. Back at the hospital, we found Bas still being ill.

10/02:

The next morning, Bas' situation had deteriorated, and it became clear that we needed to go to a proper hospital immediately. Since there is no cell phone connection and only one doctor in Bogol, we had to go back to Negele. This would unfortunately also mean that we could not look for the much-wanted *Somali Wheatear*, *Somali Bee-eater* etc. We decided to first go to the UN post in town, to ask whether we could use their satellite phone line to call ahead. That turned out to be a bad idea. The local head of the UN was very angry at seeing white people with lenses etc, so he took some of our passports and cameras. He did not consider our permission letter (which Mesfin had brought from Addis) to be sufficient for clearance, and was especially condescending towards Mesfin. But after a while, he fortunately gave us back our stuff, and let us leave. Ethiopian Quadrants was one of the few tour operators still willing to go to Bogol Manyo, but this may have been the last time, at least for a while!

On our way back between Bogol Manyo and Filtu, we saw 270 **Vulturine Guineafowl** on the road, 1 **Martial Eagle**, 2 **Somali Coursers** and a few **Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Larks**.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Bogol Manyo area is a good site:

Somali Bee-eater, *Somali Wheatear*, *Philippa's Crombec*, *Parrot-billed Sparrow*, *White-winged Dove*, *Short-tailed Lark*, *Juba Weaver*, *Hartlaub's Bustard*, and sometimes, *Golden Pipit*.

We never saw the first four and last of these species.

18. Dawa River [11/02: 06-12h]

From Negele, we departed for the Dawa River in the early morning, and en route connected with 2 **Kori Bustards**, 1 **Martial Eagle**, 2 **Pygmy Falcons** and 10 **Golden-breasted Starlings** from the car.

At the river crossing at DA_Sp100 (05:55-06:45), we had hoped to find *White-winged Dove*: the Swiss group that we were in telephone contact with, had heard of someone seeing them at this spot the week before, and not at the Dawa river site itself. But despite extensive searching through the hundreds of doves present here, we could not find a *White-winged*. The highlight was **Black-faced Sandgrouse**: in total 24 birds in several small groups flew by or landed to drink nearby -- handsome birds! Other sightings included 4 **Black-cheeked Waxbills**, 1 male **Eastern Violet-backed Starling**, 2 **Gabar Goshawks**, 1 **Greater Honeyguide** and 4 **Bristle-crowned Starlings**. After birding for a while at this site, we realised that we should be at the Dawa River instead, before it would get too hot to catch up with the sunbird, weaver and dove there. On the way, we saw 25 **Golden-breasted Starlings**, **Pygmy Falcon**, **Dark-chested Snake-Eagle** and a very welcome single **Magpie Starling** (x: DA01).

When we arrived at the Dawa River, it was 08:30, and quite hot already. The locals here were looking for gold in the river. They seemed uncomfortable with our presence, but after telling them that we were here for birds instead of stealing gold, they became more relaxed. We parked on the south bank, west of the road at DA06, and started to walk around. First, we checked the area near the car and in a nearby wadi at DA03. Bird activity was already low, and in the first hour, there was no trace of the dove, sunbird or weaver. After a while, Jelmer found a **White-winged Dove** along the river at x: DA02. It was singing in a tree on the other side of the river. While looking through our telescopes, a small dark sunbird was flitting around just below the dove: **Black-bellied Sunbird!**

It was really hot, so we then first headed back to the car for a refreshment. But leaving without *Juba Weaver* was no option, of course, so we soon sent ourselves back into the field. During another check of the wadi, Sjoerd found two **Brown-tailed Rock Chats** (x: DA03). We were quite happy with this species, which is a NE Africa endemic that is not often seen away from Sof Omar (which we had skipped). Now we walked further along the river, and finally hit the jackpot: 20+ **Juba weavers** (at x: DA04) in summer plumage, **White-winged Doves** and two stunning breeding plumage males **Black-bellied Sunbirds!** The weavers were in the thick bushes along the river, but also came to drink at x: DA05. Other birds at this spot included 4 **Eastern Violet-backed Sunbirds**, 1 **Barred Warbler**, **Lesser Masked Weavers**, **Black-billed Woodhoopoes**, **White-headed Vulture**, 3 **White-crested Helmet-shrikes** and a male **Northern Masked Weaver**. With all boxes ticked at 11:30, it was time to move on to Yabello!

On the way, we stopped at DA08, where Mesfin knew there was a colony of **Black-capped Social Weavers**.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Dawa River is a good site:
Water Thick-Knee, *Grey Kestrel*. We saw the latter at Lake Ziway, but never saw the former.

19. Yabello area [11 - 14/02]

11/02:

We arrived in the Yabello area from the Dawa River, so we drove via Wachile and Soda. Before reaching Yabello itself, one of the specialties of the area was already in the pocket: **Stresemann's Bush Crow** (x: YA02). We then had a stop at YA_BeF (15:30-16:40). We walked around northeast of the road to search for *Desert* and *Boran Cisticola*. Many cisticolas here indeed, but most were **Ashy Cisticolas**, only a few **Desert Cisticolas** (x: YA04) and no *Boran Cisticola*. Other good birds included a steep 10 **White-bellied Bustards**, a **Kori Bustard**, a **Greater-spotted Eagle** and a handsome **Heuglin's Courser** (among the bushes at x: YA03).

Our next stop was near a small settlement, at YA_BeE (17:00-17:30). This is supposed to be a good spot for **Short-tailed Lark**, and sure enough, at x: YA05 we found a flock of 36 birds here. They were quietly foraging on the field until a **Gabar Goshawk** disturbed them and managed to catch one in the air. Also 20 **Shelley's Rufous Sparrows** and 5+ **Crowned Plovers** here.

We called ahead to Yabello, but all hotels were apparently full booked, so we went to Mega (YA06) instead, and fortunately found a basic hotel there.

12/02:

Since we still hadn't seen *Salvadori Serin*, our first goal of today was to arrange permission for entering Arero Forest the next day. So at first light we drove from Mega to Yabello town. On the way we saw 2 **Black-winged Kites**, 2 **Abyssinian Ground Hornbills**, and 2 **Buff-crested Bustards**.

After checking in at a Hawi (or something similar) Hotel in Yabello (at YA08, nearby the Yabello Motel; and here we saw 8 **Mottled Swifts**, 1 **Grey-headed Bushshrike**, and 2 **Ruppel's Starlings**), and arranging permission for visiting Arero forest the next day, we went birding at YA_BeB (09:10-11:00). By then, it was pretty hot already. We walked the area on the east side of the road, and still observed a lot of new birds: 5 **Spotted Palm Thrushes**, 2 **Bare-eyed Thrushes**, 5+ **Rufous Chatterers** (but no *Scaly...*), **Black-capped Social Weavers**, 1 **Red-fronted Barbet**, 5+ **White-browed Scrub Robin**, 4 **Orange-bellied Parrots**, a few **Purple Grenadiers**, 5+ **White-bellied Canaries**, 2 **Red-naped Bushshrikes**, 3 **d'Arnoud's Barbets**, 1 **Green-winged Pitilya**, 1 male **Northern Grosbeak Canary**, 2 **Black-cheeked Waxbills**, 1 **Three-streaked Tchagra**, 1 **Pringle's Puffback**, 1 **Banded Parisoma**, and 3 **Black-throated Barbets**. A good score, but no *Scaly Chatterer* and *Hunter's Sunbird* yet.

The next stop was at YA_Sp110 (11:15-12:30). While sitting in the shade of a big tree along the road here, we found a nice **Little Sparrowhawk** in the same tree. We walked around southeast of the main road in order to look for *Red-and-yellow Barbet* (for most trips not a hard species at all, and by many already seen in the Genale River area..) and *Boran Cisticola*. The latter gave us a headache, because it is so similar to *Rattling* -- and to make things worse, the cisticolas were not vocal at this time of the year. So we were restricted to the subtle and subjective plumage features that differentiate these two. We found a flock of cisticolas, some of them clearly **Rattling**, others looked more like *Boran*. But were they *Boran Cisticolas* indeed, or variation within *Rattling*? We left these birds unidentified, wondering how other groups identify them. The relatively poor score at this site: 6 **Banded Parisomas**, 2 **Black-cheeked Waxbills**, 2 **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers**, 2 **Three-streaked Tchagras**, 3 **White-bellied Canaries** and 20 **d'Arnoud's Barbets**.

Early afternoon, we walked around at YA_Sp111 (12:45-14:20), just west of the road, which was really good, resulting in seeing three target species: a stunning male **Hunter's Sunbird**, an indeed tiny **Tiny Cisticola**, and a group of **Scaly Chatterers**. The chatterers were very sneaky, the group moved through the area, disappearing from bush to bush -- but with some patience all of us had good views. We saw many of the species typical for the area here, including 8 **Crested Francolins**, 1 2cy **Barred Warbler**, 5+ **White-bellied Canaries**, 1 **Northern Grosbeak-Canary**, 1 female **Pringle's Puffback** and 2 **Pygmy Batises**.

Birding in the afternoon heat had made us tired, so it was then time for a coke in Dubluk. While enjoying the soda, we found some sparrows in the trees above the terrace, which looked like

House Sparrows. Common in Amsterdam, but not in Ethiopia (there are no Ethiopian records at all!). We photographed the birds, and they were **House Sparrows** indeed (x: [YA10](#)). Possibly with some Somali Sparrow influences, or simply ssp. *indicus* birds expanding northwards from Kenya, where they are common after having been introduced.

After the refreshments, we searched for and easily found **Foxy Lark** south of Dubluk, east of the road (x: [YA11](#)). A very nice bonus was a group of six handsome **Grey-headed Silverbills** at the same spot.

The end of the day was spent at [YA BeG](#) (15:50-17:25). We walked both sides of the road one km eastwards and back again, resulting in some 65 **Grey-capped Social Weavers**, 10+ **Black-capped Social Weavers**, 3 **Red-billed Buffalo-Weavers**, a female **Pygmy Falcon**, 2 **Cardinal Woodpeckers**, 4 **Grey-headed Silverbills**, 5+ **White-tailed Swallows**, 3 **Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes**, and a male **Steel-blue Whydah** in flight, seen only by Sander. Just before dusk, we found a nice flock of some 50 **Chestnut Sparrows** at x: [YA12](#), including males in summer plumage.

14/02:

Because an old trip report had mentioned *Orange River Francolin* (possible future split: Archer's Francolin) near Yabello Town (at x: [YA13](#)), we spent the first two hours birding at this spot, which is at walking distance just northwest of our hotel. No sign of any francolin, and the habitat was unattractive with not many other good birds either. We then walked towards [YA17](#), where we walked through a scrubby area and saw 4 **Buff-bellied Warblers**, 3 **Spotted Palm Thrushes** and a male **Greater Honeyguide**. We also checked the Yabello Motel gardens, where both *Steel-blue* and *Straw-tailed Whydahs* are sometimes seen according to the Spottiswoode guide, but had no luck.

We had now seen all the major targets for the Yabello area, and were only missing less important species for which we did not have any additional useful leads (most notably *whydahs*, *Boran Cisticola*, *Red-and-yellow Barbet*). So after breakfast, we decided to leave the area and head for Nechisar NP.

While driving out of town at 08:30, we saw a group of swifts, mainly **Mottled** (10), **Alpine** (15) and **Nyanza** (18), but also an unexpected 3 **White-rumped Swifts** (rather early in the year for this species in Ethiopia). Just after leaving Yabello town westwards, we searched for *Verreaux's Eagle-Owl* in the big tree at x: [YA14](#), but did not see it. A stroll in the area resulted in a **Little Rock Thrush**, **White-rumped Babblers** and two **White-cheeked Turacos**. According to the Spottiswoode guide, the area here should also be good for the still missing **Bare-faced Go-away-bird**, and sure enough, at x: [YA15](#) we found it before even leaving the car.

While driving further west, we were becoming a little bit very much worried, as we were still missing **Red-and-yellow Barbet**. Fortunately, we found it at x: [YA16](#). More frustrating was the sight of a male *whydah* sp. flying past the car (x: [YA18](#)), which we could not relocate. This must have been either *Steel-blue* or *Straw-tailed*.

At YA_BeO (11:45-12:40), we searched both sides of the riverbed southwest of the bridge for *Parrot-billed Sparrows*, but just like in Bogol Manyo, we could only find **Swainson's Sparrows** (were we too critical here? Well, they surely didn't look like the Parrot-billed drawings in the book). Other birds found here included many **Crested Francolins**, another **Red-and-Yellow Barbet**, **Nubian Woodpecker**, **Cardinal Woodpecker**, 20 **Vulturine Guineafowl**, **Blue-naped Mousebirds**, 4 **Wattled Starlings**, **Violet-backed Starlings**, 3 **Lesser Masked Weavers** and yet two more **Black-cheeked Waxbills**. In the village a bit further on, that is also mentioned in Behrens for *Parrot-billed* (x: YA19), we again only found **Swainson's Sparrow**.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Yabello area is good site:

Vulturine Guineafowl, *Temminck's* and *Somali Coursers*, *Water Thick-Knee*, *Black-faced Sandgrouse*, *Boran Cisticola*, *Magpie Starling*, *Chestnut Weaver*, *Parrot-billed Sparrow* (although the situation is unclear, also see Bogol Manyo). Only the thick-knee, cisticola and sparrow, we didn't see elsewhere.

20. Arero Forest [13/02: 07-15h]

After picking up a guard at AR01, we left Yabello at 04h to head for Arero Forest with only one goal: catching up with the *Salvadori's Seedeater*, the only endemic we still had left. During the long drive, we saw a **Donaldson Smith's Nightjar** in the headlights of the car. We arrived at 06h at the village of Arero. Here the trouble started: we were called to a halt and were obliged to meet the director of the forest. He told us that we needed additional papers from Yabello, and were not allowed to enter the forest! A worrisome hour followed, with our driver doing his very best to get us in, making many phone calls, and trying to persuade different people around our car. In the end we were allowed to enter, but we had to take an additional guard from the village. Very happy that we could finally enter, but also a bit worried because we had lost a precious hour of early morning birding, we went into the forest. We parked the vehicle just south of AR_Sp105 at 07:15, and walked straight to the pools at AR03. During this short walk, we met a group of Swedish birders. They had been in the forest for two days, and had seen exactly one *Salvadori's Seedeater*: the day before, drinking at the main pool that was still holding water.

We installed ourselves there, and waited....waited...and waited.... **Reichenow's Seedeaters** came to drink regularly, but not one *Salvadori's* accompanied them. After a few hours of fruitless waiting, we drove to a nearby open area in the forest (AR07), hoping we might find it there. No luck of course, but Sjoerd saw **Green-backed Eremomelas** here, and Sander had views of a cisticola which looked really good for a *Boran*. On the way back to the pools we saw a **Narina Trogon** in the forest. The rest of the day was spent waiting at the pool for the %&# Seedeater. We also regularly checked the area at AR04, where quite some finches could be found, but only saw **Green-backed Eremomela** here (x: AR07; finally everyone could connect with this species).

Around 14h, the guards became really hungry and impatient -- it became clear that we had to leave, and that the *Salvadori's Seedeater* would be our only missing endemic. While we walked back to the car, Jelmer decided to take a little detour, via AR04. After waiting some ten minutes everybody became impatient, but there was Jelmer, out of breath, just capable of telling us he had seen the seedeater!! Within seconds we were at x: AR06, and some very nervous minutes later we finally all were looking at a pair **Salvadori's Serin**!!! Damn, what a relief! Finally finding and seeing this endemic was the highlight of the trip for us. Even the hungry guards lighted up when they saw us so exhilarated. We left the forest with a euphoric feeling.

Even though we had eventually seen *Salvadori's Serin* here, it is obvious that we made a mistake by skipping Sof Omar. That said, Filtu might in fact be a quite reliable spot it, and it may have been mainly due to the drought (no water for seedeaters in that area without pools) that we missed it there. But Arero is definitely not a convenient back-up site: it's troublesome to get permission, it's a considerable drive from Yabello, and the *Salvadori's Serin* does not appear to be common or easy.

The forest also gave us a few other good species, some not seen elsewhere: a male **White-breasted Cuckooshrike** (just northeast of AR03), 3 **Violet-backed Starlings**, 1 **Black Cuckooshrike**, 2 **African Hobbies**, 1 **Little Sparrowhawk**, **Broad-billed Rollers** and an **Ovambo Sparrowhawk**. The latter was a dark morph that we could identify with certainty from the pictures, mainly on the basis of the very long toes. A final reason to visit Arero Forest is the **Prince Ruspoli's Turaco**. It is not common here...it is abundant! (Although the 'guide' from Arero town still deemed it necessary to keep pointing them out to us...)

21. Nechisar National Park [14/02: 16h-dusk - 15/02: dawn-10h]

14/02:

We arrived at the HQ of the National Park at 16:10. We obtained permission for camping near the HQ. After pitching our tents we had a trickle of time left for birding the camping grounds, producing **Narina Trogon**, **Common Nightingale**, **Wahlberg's Honeybird**, **White-browed Robin-Chat**, **Red-headed Weaver** and **Greater Honeyguide**.

Unfortunately, it turned out not be possible to enter the park at all. There were problems both with roads that hadn't been maintained, and bandits that were terrorizing the neighbourhood. A bit disappointed of course, we decided to walk around near the HQ in the morning, and then take a leisurely boat tour in the afternoon.

15/02:

At dawn, we walked (without Sander, who wasn't feeling well) from the HQ towards the fig forest and beyond, where e.g. *Yellowbill*, *Red-capped Robin-chat*, *Scaly-throated Honeyguide* should be present. While it was still dusky, we flushed a few **Freckled Nightjars** from the track. Along most of the way, the forest is rather scrubby second-growth, although unlike in many previous

locations, it was green and dense. Bird activity was quite low here (once again), so we walked almost straight on to the fig forest, where we unsuccessfully looked for *Red-capped Robin-chat*. We expected a singing *tinkerbird* to be a *Yellow-fronted* in this wet habitat, but when we taped it in, it turned out to be another **Red-fronted Tinkerbird**.

The area around NE03-NE04 was supposed to be good for *Yellowbill* and the *honeyguide*, and this actually turned out to be more dense second-growth. Here we soon heard at least 3 **Scaly-throated Honeyguides** singing, and we successfully taped one in. Despite even more taping, we didn't get any *Yellowbills*. At least we initially thought so -- there were some *Yellowbill*-like calls, but we deemed them too soft and of a slightly different quality than on the tape. But later at Bishangari, it turned out that actual *Yellowbills* indeed also have rather soft, 'unconvincing' calls. Other birds that we saw in this area included 2 **Broad-billed Rollers**, a non-br **Chestnut Weaver**, many **Northern Brownbuls**, 2 **Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrikes**, 1 **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike**, at least 5 **Rufous Chatterers** and as many **Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrikes**. At around 08:20, we walked back towards the camp. Some other species seen during this walk were 12 **Mottled Swifts**, **Silvery-cheeked**, **African Grey**, and **Von der Deckens Hornbills**, 1 **Beautiful**, 1 **Eastern Violet-backed**, and some 10 **Collared Sunbirds**. At the campsite, there was quite some bird activity again, with **Black Scimitarbill** being a new species for the trip.

The plan was to take a boat trip in the afternoon, but unfortunately, Bas' head had started to swell up again, and we had to act on this. We decided to get Bas on the first airplane home this time, so we drove as quickly as we could back to Awassa, where someone from Ethiopian Quadrants fetched Bas to take him to the airport. We had to do the rest of the trip without him, and Bas was about to miss some lifers, unfortunately! Some notable sightings en route included **Bare-faced Go-away Bird**, **Gray-backed Fiscals**, and **Northern Carmine Bee-eaters**.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Nechisar is a good site (when fully accessible!): *Secretary Bird*, *Black-bellied Bustard*, *Spotted Thick-Knee*, *Dusky & Star-spotted Nightjar*, *Yellowbill*, *White-tailed Lark*, *Northern Masked Weaver*, *Green-backed Twinspot*, and *Red-capped Robin-chat*. A number of these species we did not see at all during the trip.

22. Lake Awassa [16/02: dawn-11h & 17/02: 15-17h]

16/02:

We stayed in the United Africa Hotel, and from the back of the hotel grounds, there is a small gate to enter the lakeside walking path (AW02). When we came there at first light, the gate was still closed, but just before we wanted to climb over it, a guard came to open it. From the gate, we birded along the lake for a few 100m northeastwards, and later also a bit southwestwards to the end of the path just past the hotel. Both people and birds were everywhere, and here is a list of the latter: 25+ **African Pygmy-goose**, 15+ **Malachite Kingfisher**, 30+ **African Jacanas**, 2 **Hottentot Teals**, 1 **Little Bittern**, 3 **Black Crakes**, 1 **Great Reed Warbler**, 5 **Lesser Swamp Warblers**, 2 **Buff-bellied Warblers**, 1 **Pink-backed Pelican**, 30+ **Red-knobbed Coots**, 20 **Common Waxbills** and 1 **Banded Barbet**. From the southwestern end of the path along the

lake, we took the road leading back to the main road that passes the front side of the hotel. Here (at x: [AW05](#)) we found a **Spotted Creeper**, and surprisingly only our first **Hadada Ibises**. The hotel gardens itself are supposed to be good for **Red-throated Wryneck**, and sure enough, we found three at the southwest corner of the gardens at x: [AW04](#) (we later also saw a few in another corner of the hotel gardens, at [AW06](#)).

After lunch at the hotel, we went to the Fish Market (09:25-10:05), where we had to pay an entrance fee. The actual market had the well-known scene of many people, dead fish, and birds. **White-winged Tern** was abundant here, and we also had 4 **Gull-billed Terns**, 1 **Marsh Sandpiper**, 4 **Garganey**, 1 **Lesser Black-backed Gull**, 8 **Great White Pelicans**, 2 **Little Stints** etc. We did not see the hoped for *Allen's Gallinule* and *Purple Swamphen*. Later, upon re-checking some trip reports, we found out that we should have checked the old location of the fish market as well, which is a few 100m more to the northwest... (near [AW_Sp63](#)).

We then explored the northern shore of the lake (10:15-10:55). To get there, turn left off the main road on the north side of Awassa, at [AW_Sp61](#), and follow that road to the lake. We birded the road along the lake for ca 1km, to [AW09](#). This was not very productive, with very few birds near or on the lake, the only notable sighting being an **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear**. The afternoon was spent at Lake Bojo.

17/02:

Mainly because we hadn't seen *Lesser Jacana* yet, and had some spare time, we returned to Lake Awassa in the afternoon on the 17th (15:00-16:30, plus some time looking for Sander's stolen bag; while staying at Lake Langano). We walked the path along the lake behind the United Africa Hotel again, and this time all the way north to [AW07](#). That was a good idea: here we found a **Lesser Jacana**. Although one would think that it should be difficult to hide among the water lilies, the *Lesser Jacana* still managed to disappear from time to time, so make sure to scan the area thoroughly. Other birds seen here today, but not on the earlier visit yesterday, were a female **Southern Pochard** and 3 **White-backed Ducks**.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Lake Awassa is a good site:

Allen's Gallinule, *Purple Swamphen*, *Black Heron*, *Banded Snake Eagle*, *Pallas' Gull*, *Grosbeak Weaver*. Except Grosbeak Weaver at Wondo, we did not see any of these species during the trip.

23. Lake Bojo [16/02: 14/16h]

Our reason for visiting this lake was *Wattled Crane*, which we missed in Bale NP; and none of us has seen it elsewhere in Africa. Not many birders know this place, and it was difficult to get information about it. Here are some directions: From Shashemene take the main road to the west. After about 60km you arrive in Alaba Kulito, where you take a right in the village at [BJ02](#). After 1.2km, go right again at [BJ03](#). After following this very bumpy road for ca 18 km, go left in

a small settlement, at [BJ04](#). After ca. 7km, at [BJ05](#), go left. Then after 2.2km (including a river crossing), take a small track to the right (at [BJ06](#)). This road has a dead end after 1.6km at Lake Bojo! (Despite the short distance, this is about a 1h15min drive from Alaba Kulito.)

We walked the last 100m to the lake, adding a male winter plumage and many female-types **White-winged Widowbird** (x: [BJ07](#)) to the list. Arriving at the lake at 14:15, it immediately became clear that we had made the right choice to go to this lake: **Wattled Cranes** were hard to miss. We saw several birds, and later in the afternoon more birds flew in -- in total we counted at least 31 individuals!! But that was not all, we also found a cooperative pair of **Black-crowned Cranes** here. We followed the shore to the north, and found a big flock of **Common Cranes** (at x: [BJ09](#)), and Jelmer found a **Demoiselle Crane** among them! Four different species of cranes on the same lake! Collateral damage at the crane bonanza included 45 **African Spoonbills**, 3 **Yellow-billed Ducks**, 4 **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters**, 6 **Northern Carmine Bee-eaters**, 1 **Openbill**, 1 **Mosque Swallow** (our only one), and 1 **Lanner Falcon**. At 16:30, we drove back to Lake Awassa.

24. Lake Langano, incl. Bishangari [17/02: 06-07h, 12-15h & 18/02: dawn-12h]

17/02:

The early morning was spent at the Bekele Mola Hotel ([LA05](#); 05:50-07:20). This hotel is now closed, and in a bad state. However, quite a few guards are around, and for a fee we were allowed to enter the hotel grounds. First, we made our way to the cliffs at the northwest side of the hotel grounds. We searched and scanned for owls around [LA08](#), but first couldn't find any. After a while, we did find a **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl** on the cliffs outside the hotel grounds at x: [LA07](#). Here we also welcomed 3 **White-winged Black Tits** and 2 **Red-throated Wrynecks**. On the hotel grounds itself, we found our first **Bearded Woodpecker** of the trip. Other interesting birds in the area included 2 **Abyssinian Black Wheatears**, 2 **Mocking Cliff Chats**, **Ruppell's, Lesser Masked** and **Spectacled Weavers**, 1 **Red-fronted Tinkerbird**, 2 **Little Rock Thrushes**, 50 **Wattled Starlings**, 1 female **Violet-backed Starling**, 1 **White-bellied Canary**, 1 **Rattling Cisticola**, 1 **Lesser Honeyguide** and 1 juvenile **Black-chested Snake-Eagle**. The rest of the morning was spent at Lake Abiata (see that section).

At noon, we checked in at the Wabe Shebelle Hotel along Lake Langano ([LA01](#)), and got a bungalow for the five of us. One of the employees of the hotel wanted to show us *Greyish Eagle-Owl* for a fee, and since we had not seen that so far, we agreed. Within minutes we were staring at two **Greyish Eagle-Owls**... around our own bungalow (x: [LA02](#))! We found a third individual as well, and they were all rather active, also calling now and then. The birds were therefore relatively easy to find here -- you might not need a guide. We decided to relax for a while around the bungalow, and while doing so added **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (both *fuscus* and *heuglini*, x: [LA04](#)), **Great White pelicans**, **Black-billed Barbet**, **Masked Shrike**, **Lesser Honeyguide** and 3 **Bearded Woodpeckers**. Directly north of the main car park (at x: [LA01](#)), we found a nice group of eight day-roosting **Slender-tailed Nightjars**, giving great photographic opportunities. The rest of the afternoon was spent at Lake Awassa, see that section.

18/02 (Bishangari):

Since we had dipped both *Yellowbill* and *Green-backed Twinspot* in Nechisar NP, we had a good reason to visit Bishangari. This humid forest area is on the southeastern side of Lake Langano, and comes with a very luxurious and expensive resort. Fortunately, it possible to stay somewhere else, and merely go there in the early morning, which is what we did. Make sure to take some time to reach the place, because the road from the main road ([LA_Sp56](#)) to the entrance of the resort ([LA12](#)) is in a very bad state (in total, it took us almost an hour from the Wabe Shabelle hotel). During this bumpy ride we saw an **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill** and a total of eight **Clapperton's Francolins** (e.g. at x: [LA10](#) and x: [LA11](#)).

The forest can only be entered with a guide from the hotel, for which we paid a fairly steep entrance fee (but we forgot how steep exactly...). We made our targets clear to the guide, and were off at 06:10. Compared to Wondo Genet, this place is a paradise -- the forest is well conserved and lush! When we crossed a field between the resort and the forest, a **Yellow-fronted Parrot** flew overhead. The guide knew the birds quite well and was really helpful, though we seized him on a mistake or two. It took a while before our guide heard **Yellowbill** calling (x: [LA15](#)). The call was much softer and more subtle than what we had expected from conditioning on the tape, and we were not too happy yet. We tried to find the calling bird, but did not manage. Fortunately, we later heard a second bird calling (at x: [LA18](#)), and after some patience we all had very good views! The other target, **Green-backed Twinspot**, also took some time. We spent ages waiting in suitable bushes, but could not find them (but did see **Red-capped Robin-Chat** in that habitat, at x: [LA14](#)). But at x: [LA16](#) we finally found two individuals in dense bushes. We thought we were lucky to find this species at all, but somehow, during the next hour they seemed to be common to abundant here: in total we must have seen some 30-40 **Green-backed Twinspots**! They stick to thick undergrowth and seem to favour small streams (e.g. at x: [LA16](#), x: [LA17](#)). A bit further north, the forest became more open and cultivated, but we still had 4 **Narina Trogons** (e.g. at x: [LA19](#)) and an **Ayres's Hawk-Eagle** (x: [LA20](#)). Other birds seen during this successful walk included 20+ **Silvery-cheeked Hornbills**, 8 **Hemprich's Hornbills**, 20 **White-cheeked Turacos**, 1 **Lesser Honeyguide**, 4 **Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrikes**, 7 **African Olive Pigeons**, 10 **Lemon Doves**, 1 **Olive Sunbird**, 5 **Blue-spotted Wood Doves**, **Black Saw-wing** (common), 1 **Abyssinian Ground Thrush**, 2 **African Hill Babblers**, and 1 **Violet-backed Starling**.

After the guided walk, at 10:45, we were in for a brunch, but seeing the prices on the menu of the resort, we decided to have some food in the field. We stopped on the way back to the main road, near the container bridge, from where we had some views of the lake ([LA_Sp58](#)). Here we saw a collection of common birds, but also a **Bare-faced Go-away Bird**, and we added **Collared Pratincole** (x: [LA21](#)) to the trip list.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Lake Langano is a good site: *Freckled Nightjar*, *Black Scimitarbill*, *Scaly Francolin* (Bishangari), *Scaly-throated Honeyguide* (Bishangari), *Pallas' Gull*, "*Ethiopian Cliff Swallow*", *Boran Cisticola*, *Grosbeak Weaver*. We never saw the gull, swallow and cisticola.

25. Lake Abiata [17/02: 08-10h]

We spent part of one morning at Lake Abiata (07:45-10:15). At AB02, we left the main road to the gate of the park. Here we paid a reasonable fee and drove towards the lake, to AB03. From there, we walked to the lake shore and scanned the lake for a while. It was packed with **Lesser Flamingos**, with some 50 **Greater Flamingos** amongst them. Other waterbirds seen here included 100 **Pied Avocets**, 10 **Black-winged Stilts**, 500 **Northern Shovelers**, 20 **Northern Pintails**, 35 **Cape Teals**, 4 **Southern Pochards**, 1 **Little Ringed Plover**, 1 **Grey Plover** (not common inland), 6 **Kentish Plovers** (also not common in Ethiopia), 7 **Dunlins** (even scarcer), 15 **Marsh Sandpipers**, 50 **Little Stints**, 20 **Curlew Sandpipers**, 4 **Crowned Plovers**, and 10 **Common Snipes**.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Lake Abiata is a good site:

Pallass' Gull, *Black Scimitarbill*, *Foxy Lark* (ssp. *intercedens*), *White-winged Black Tit*, *Black Crowned Crane*, and more rarely, *Temminck's Courser*.

26. Lake Ziway [04/02: 09-10h & 18/02: 14-15h]

We visited Lake Ziway twice, once on the way to the 'southern loop' (09:00-10:00), and once on the way back (14:10-15:05). The place is well known for the many tame birds foraging amongst the local fishermen, giving good photo opportunities. Go off the main road at ZI01, to ZI02. Common birds seen on both visits include **White-faced Whistling Duck**, **African Pygmy Goose**, **African Fish Eagle**, **Marabou Stork**, **Yellow Wagtail** (*feldegg*), **African Jacana**, **Gull-billed Tern**, **Hamerkop**, **Malachite Kingfisher**, **Pied Kingfisher**, **Black Crane**, **Red-knobbed Coot** etc. Birds that we encountered only once include **Fulvous Whistling Duck**, **Blue-checked Bee-eater**, **Knob-billed Duck**, **Spur-winged Goose**, **Temminck's Stint** and **Grey Kestrel** (overhead).

Species that we did not see here, but for which Lake Ziway is a good site:

Black Heron, *Lesser Jacana*, *Southern Pochard*, *Saddle-billed Stork*, *Black Crowned Crane*. Except for the heron, we saw all these species elsewhere.

27. Lake Koka [18/02: 16-17h30]

On the way to Lake Koka, coming from Lake Ziway, we saw a **Black-chested Snake-Eagle** and a **Black-winged Kite**. Our first stop was at KO01, where we scanned the lake: 40+ **Hottentot Teals** was the only notable sighting. A brief stop at KO Sp52 produced a pair of **Black-crowned Cranes**, and so did a stop at KO Sp51, where we also had a **Spur-winged Goose**, 2 **Saddle-billed Storks**, and 8 **Hottentot Teals**. We ended the day with scanning the lake at

KO02. To get there, get off the main road at KO_BeA. We saw an adult **Greater Spotted Eagle**, 6 **African Spoonbills**, 1 **Tawny Pipit**, 2 **Pallid Harriers** and 4 **Black-crowned Cranes** here.

Species that we did not see here, but for which Lake Koka is a good site:

Red-chested Swallow, *Chestnut Weaver*, *Chestnut Sparrow* (all fairly rarely seen).

28. Debre Zeyt Lakes [19/02: 06-11h]

At 06:00, we were at Lake Chekelaka. We first tried to approach the lake from the western side. However, the light is -of course- very bad when looking east in the early morning. The presence of some 4000 **Common Cranes** was nonetheless impressive. This side of the lake can be reached by going north of the main road at DZ_Sp49, then right again at DZ01, then left at DZ02; then park at DZ03, and walk to the lake at DZ04. We soon decided to try the eastern side of the lake for better light conditions. To get there, turn north from the main road at DZ_Sp48, and turn left at DZ06, parking at DZ07. From here, we walked to the lake at DZ08. Scanning the lake resulted in 50 each **Lesser** and **Greater Flamingos**, 3 **Red-billed Ducks**, 1 **Greater Spotted Eagle**, 1 **Steppe Eagle**, 40 **Spur-winged Goose**, 1 **Great Sparrowhawk**, 2 **Abdim's Storks**, 15 **Yellow-billed Ducks** and 1 **Red-tailed Shrike**. So far so good, the only wildfowl box unticked had the name *Maccoa Duck* next to it.

Just after 8 o'clock, we had great views of the rather sterile Lake Bishoftu while having breakfast at a fancy place at DZ15. Despite the nice view, there wasn't much to see on the lake: 100s of **Little Grebes** and a female **Southern Pochard** were the only birds on the lake, and 5 **White-billed Starlings** (odd location?!) flew by.

We also briefly visited Bishoftu Guda Lake, but there was nothing to see there, except for our only **Osprey** of the trip. If you still want to go there: turn northeast off the main road at the roundabout at DZ11, then turn right at DZ13, and after a kilometer, there is a car park on the left hand side.

Lake Hora was the last lake that we visited in the area. To get there, also turn northeast off the main road at the roundabout at DZ11, and after 1.3km, there is an exit (DZ12) to the left, which goes to the lake. We scanned the lake, and were happy to finally attach to a pair of **Maccoa Ducks**. Also present on the lake were a **Black-necked Grebe**, three males **Southern Pochards** and an immature **Western Reef Egret** (our only one).

We also tried to find Green Lake, as described in the Spottiswoode guide. However, the road to the lake is blocked at DZ10, so it was impossible to get there. There seems to be a military basis nearby.

29. Menagesha Forest [19/02: 14h - 15h30]

We had some spare time on the 19th, and decided to spend it at Menagesha Forest, a place mentioned in Spottiswoode. We were probably quietly hoping to see *Abyssinian Crimsonwing*, a pretty and local species that we had missed at Hareenna. We got off road 7 (the road to the Gibe Gorge) at [ME01](#), and drove to the well sign-posted office of the forest at [ME_Sp06](#). Here we obtained tickets and walked uphill through the forest, but soon it became clear that it was quiet in the forest -- very quiet. Jelmer managed to get glimpses of a **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk**, but that was about it. In hindsight, visiting this place was a waste of time.

30. Gibe Gorge [20/02: all day & 21/02: dawn-10:30]

Many people visit the Gibe Gorge just one day, and all the way from Addis. We stayed in nearby Welkite however, which made it easy to be in the gorge at dawn. We slept in a fine hotel of which we unfortunately forgot the name; but it is located at [GI01](#).

20/02:

In the early morning, we drove straight to the river down in the gorge, and started walking westwards along the south bank of the river. Directly from the bridge onwards, there are bushes along the river, and these proved to be good for finches: **Bar-breasted Firefinch** was more common than **Red-billed Firefinch** here, and in the bushes close to the bridge we even found three **Black-faced Firefinches** (x: [GI02](#)), a very handsome near-endemic. We also found three **Snowy-crowned Robin-Chats** in the bushes a bit further (x: [GI03](#)). This area further produced 20 **Yellow-fronted Canaries**, 1 **Lesser Honeyguide**, and 1 **Black-crowned Tchagra**. The 7 *Hippos* lying in the river were also highly appreciated. On the stony riverbanks, **Senegal Thick-knee** was common.

One of the main reasons for walking here in the morning was *Yellow-throated Sandgrouse*: they drink mid-morning and we had heard they might fly by. Sure enough, twice a **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse** flew past, although not very close by. From [GI03](#) we made our way to the fields to a path parallel to the river. To the west, this path goes through some fields, and along a small settlement. In this area, we saw 5 **Pale Flycatchers**, 5+ **Lesser Striped Swallows**, 2 **Isabelline** and 1 **Red-tailed Shrike**, 2 **Clapperton's Francolins**, 3 **Stout Cisticolas**, 50+ **Black-winged Red Bishops**, and 10+ **Vinaceous Doves**. The path crosses a dry river bed via a bridge that was in very bad state at [GI07](#). Near this bridge, we finally found 15 **Abyssinian Waxbills**. After the bridge, the path continues through agricultural fields, and we had information that we could find *Four-banded Sandgrouse* on the left hand side of the road, in the fields. However, as soon as we saw that the field was covered with very high, dried out vegetation, we did not expect to find them. Fortunately we were wrong, and after only a few minutes we flushed **Four-banded Sandgrouses** from these fields (x: [GI09](#)), which eventually gave great views. Sandgrouse species number five of the trip! While returning to our starting point ([GI_Sp10](#)) at the end of the morning, two of us saw a **Brown Snake Eagle** soaring over the gorge.

At 10:30 we returned to Welkite to have a proper lunch (huge chicken burger with fries) at our hotel. We were back in the Gibe Gorge, at GI14, by 14h30. It was still rather hot, but a walk on both sides of the road resulted in 2 **Brown-snake Eagles**, 1 **Familiar Chat**, 4 **Green-backed Eremomelas** (again! We were lucky with this species), and a male **Klaas's Cuckoo**. The next stop was mentioned as a possible site for Red-billed Pytilia (GI10), and indeed, within minutes we briefly saw a female **Red-billed Pytilia** as well as 4 **Familiar Chats**, a pair of **Black-faced Firefinches** and 2 **Lesser Blue-eared Starlings**.

A short walk at GI11 (16h15-16h45) produced 4 **Village Indigobirds**, 40+ **Ortolan Buntings**, and 30+ **Yellow-fronted Canaries**. At 17h, we arrived at GI12, a spot with agricultural fields with views of the river down in the gorge. Just after leaving the car, we saw three **Yellow-throated Sandgrouses** landing on the fields. We approached them and had great views close by, what a great birds! More and more individuals landed in the same field -- in total we saw 22 birds (x: GI13). Here we also saw 2 **Long-billed Pipits** and 15+ **Clapperton's Francolins**.

21/02:

The next morning, we again walked for a few hours along the south bank of the river (from GI_Sp10 to GI08). We saw many of the same species as yesterday, but also some new birds. We found a spot where some 35 **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse** came to drink at the stony riverbank at 8am (x: GI06). **Four-banded Sandgrouse** was seen at the same place as yesterday. We also saw **Bar-breasted** and **Black-faced Firefinch** again, and while we had struggled a bit to find **Abyssinian Waxbills** yesterday, they were abundant today, with some 400 birds, most of them at x: GI04. An adult **Barred Warbler** (after several juveniles earlier during the trip) was nice, and other interesting sightings included ca 10 **Clapperton's Francolins**, 100+ **Black-winged Red Bishop** (all in non-breeding plumage, i.e. hard to ID, but the large size was quite obvious), 2 **Masked Shrikes**, 7 **Grey-headed Kingfishers**, 2 **Foxy Cisticolas** and 1 **African Hobby**.

A short stop at GI13 produced **Red-billed Pytilia** once again, and also 1 **Stout** and 2 **Foxy Cisticolas** as well as a **Pale Flycatcher**. Our final stop in the Gibe Gorge area before heading back to Addis was GI14, our last chance to see Reichard's Seedeater. No sign of this bird, but we did see two more **Pale Flycatchers**, a **Familiar Chat** and a **Greyish Eagle-Owl**. The latter was flushed from a big tree along the south side of the road (x: GI15).

On the way back to Addis, a lunch stop at Negash Lodge (GI17) produced a final new species: **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird**.

We can conclude that the days spent at the Gibe Gorge were very successful. We did not see *Reichard's Seedeater*, *African Quail-Finch* and *Exclamatory Paradise Whydah*, which are possible here as well (but likely seasonal). Doing a daytrip from Addis is maybe not a good idea, as it's then hard to be in the gorge in the early morning and evening, which certainly makes the birding less enjoyable, and likely costs you some species. Welkite is close to the gorge and has a good and cheap hotel -- staying there the night before to be in the gorge at first light is recommended.

Species that we did not see here, but for which the Gibe Gorge is a good site:

Reichard's Seedeater, *African Quail-Finch* and *Exclamatory Paradise Whydah*, *Moustached Grass Warbler* (rarely), *White-throated Seedeater*, *Eastern Grey Plain-tain-eater*.