

Trip Report Birdingbreaks February 2025

Original version in Dutch, with many photos: [Here](#)

DAY 1: Addis Ababa – Debre Zeit

After some delays and hassle, the whole group finally makes it through customs. Binoculars and telescopes are only allowed into the country if you have prior approval from the right authorities. Fortunately, all the paperwork is in order, and everything is cleared to go. Not a minor detail for a two-week birding trip! And with that, the most stressful moment of the journey is already behind us.

We meet our local guides, Jan and Elias. Jan is a Belgian who has lived in Ethiopia for years, and Elias is an Ethiopian birder who has made guiding his profession. Three sturdy Toyota Land Cruisers are ready, and once everyone is settled into the cars, we head towards Debre Zeit, our base for the first two days. After some rest at the lodge, we begin with a walk around Lake Hora. We start off strong with several near-endemic species, including Ethiopian Boubou, Black-winged Lovebird, and Banded Barbet. Birds are everywhere—Rüppell's Weaver, Rüppell's Robin-chat, Rufous Chatterer, and Black-billed Barbet make notable appearances. We also spot several woodpeckers, such as Cardinal Woodpecker, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, and Nubian Woodpecker. A Red-throated Wryneck gives a fantastic view—it's the African counterpart to our Eurasian Wryneck.

The highlight of the morning is a stunning African Spotted Creeper, which the whole group gets to admire in detail. A promising start to the trip!

Later in the afternoon, once the worst of the heat has passed, we visit an agricultural area. It's quite dry, but birds are plentiful. We find our first lark and wheatear species of the trip: Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark and Pied Wheatear. As we continue searching, we soon locate our primary target species for this spot—the Erlanger's Lark, a striking near-endemic that can only be seen in this region.

In the distance, a bustard is spotted—an unusual sight here, as our local guide rarely sees bustards in this area. Identifying the species proves tricky, as the bird appears almost melanistic, so dark is its plumage. After carefully approaching, we can finally confirm the name: a Black-bellied Bustard, the only one we will see on this trip.

As dusk begins to settle, thousands of Common Cranes fly overhead to roost on the nearby lake. The surrounding grasslands also turn out to be a roosting site for harriers—Montagu's Harriers and Pallid Harriers arrive from all directions. A spectacular scene to close out our first day in Ethiopia.

DAY 2: Debre Zeit

At Lake Hora, dozens of ducks float on the water. Species such as Southern Pochard, Maccoa Duck, Red-billed Teal, Cape Teal, and Tufted Duck are well represented here. One of the specialties of this location is the near-endemic Erckel's Francolin. We hear their calls from various directions and soon get a great view of one!

We descend a little into the crater to get a better view of the lake. As the temperature rises, the raptors become active. Rüppell's Vulture, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Booted Eagle, and Egyptian Vulture soar above us, while on the rocks, species such as Reichenow's Seedeater, Abyssinian Wheatear, White-winged Cliff Chat, and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting can be found. Another target species here is the White-billed Starling. For a moment, it seems we might miss them, but then a group flies by beautifully!

We've spent more time birdwatching than planned, and hunger is setting in. After a good breakfast at the lodge, we return to Lake Hora, where we add Grey-headed Batis, Lesser Honeyguide, African Citril, and Northern Puffback to our list. In Debre Zeit, the large numbers of Marabou Storks are impossible to miss. They have built their nests in trees throughout the city, and adult birds fly back and forth among the beautifully purple Jacaranda trees.

After a siesta at the lodge, we head in the afternoon to Lake Chelekaleka, which, unlike the other lakes, is not a crater lake. Depending on the season, the water level is either high or low. At present, the water level is low, concentrating the birds in the remaining water. Large numbers of ducks gather here, including Blue-billed Teal, Yellow-billed Teal, Fulvous Whistling Duck, White-faced Whistling Duck, and Northern Pintail. Waders are also well represented: Marsh Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Little Stint, Black-winged Stilt, and African Jacana forage in the shallow waters. Among the Marabou Storks, a few Black Crowned Cranes walk elegantly by—a much more refined sight!

After a restful night, allowing everyone to recover from the long flight, the group is up and ready at 6:15 AM for a new day. In the early morning twilight, a Montane Nightjar flies around the lodge, even landing briefly on the roof of one of the buildings, offering a great view.

Before breakfast, we head to Green Lake, a crater lake on the outskirts of Debre Zeit. This unique habitat is otherwise only known from northern Ethiopia (which we will not be visiting), making this a rare opportunity to see certain species. As we climb to the crater rim, we immediately spot some wonderful birds such as Red-fronted Barbet, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, and Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu. From the crater edge, we enjoy a spectacular view of the lake, where an African Paradise Flycatcher adds to the scene.

Morning birdwatching at Lake Bishoftu brings familiar species from yesterday alongside a few new additions. Two Lanner Falcons put on a great show, a Buff-bellied Warbler skulks through the acacias, a Dark Chanting Goshawk perches atop an electricity pole, and we finally spot our first hornbill of the trip—Hemprich's Hornbill.

We end the day on the far side of the lake, waiting for the Common Cranes that come here to roost. While we wait, we enjoy a stunning view of a Malachite Kingfisher, watch a Barn Owl hunting in the twilight, and notice dozens of Whiskered Terns settling on the lake for the night.

At sunset, the breathtaking spectacle we were hoping for unfolds—hundreds of Common Cranes arrive in large flocks, gracefully landing on the water. A truly impressive end to a beautiful day in the Rift Valley! The return walk to the lodge takes place in darkness. Suddenly, someone realizes that a backpack has been left behind. Back we go! Fortunately, with phone flashlights, we quickly find it—luckily, we noticed in time!

On the way back to the lodge, we successfully search for Spotted Hyenas. It's an unforgettable experience to see a hyena family with young right next to the vehicle.

DAY 3: Debre Zeit – Awash

The journey to Awash is long, but after two days, the group has naturally settled into a “fixed” car arrangement that everyone is happy with. It's interesting how this developed organically and seems to work perfectly. Jan leads the convoy, followed in order by the other two vehicles, each with their regular passengers.

The road is busy with truck traffic heading to Djibouti, slowing our pace significantly. Along the way, more delays arise—a forgotten bag (with a passport inside!) and a flat tire add stress to the trip. Fortunately,

both issues are resolved quickly—the hotel staff finds the bag and rushes to return it, and the tire is expertly repaired.

With everything back in order, we continue our journey. A spectacular sighting of Saddle-billed Storks adds to the excitement, making this an eventful but rewarding day in the Rift Valley.

Our journey begins with some unexpected delays, but luckily, our drivers are able to handle them. Along the way, we get some welcome distractions, including a large group of nine Abyssinian Ground Hornbills. At a lava field, we search for a highly localized species—the Sombre Rock Chat. Fortunately, we find it with ease. It's not the most striking bird of the trip, but certainly a special one, as it has an extremely limited range and thrives in a very specific habitat. During this short stop, we also spot the stunning Yellow-breasted Barbet, Bristle-headed Starlings, and a beautiful Nile Valley Sunbird.

We take a longer break at Lake Basaka, a hotspot for waterbirds and waders. A pair of impressive Saddle-billed Storks forage nearby, while Kittlitz's Plovers and Common Ringed Plovers scurry along the shore, wary of the Nile Crocodiles lurking in the water. As we continue towards Awash, we stop again at another lava field, a rugged terrain with sparse vegetation. Despite the harsh environment, we still manage to find Blackstart and Common Rock Thrush.

Upon arriving at Awash National Park, we are assigned armed escorts. Three rangers carrying Kalashnikovs climb onto the roofs of our vehicles—a rather unusual experience. Thankfully, they are not a nuisance, and some even help spot birds.

We take a walk along the road, searching for birds among the acacia trees in the intense heat. This effort results in sightings of Grey Wren Warbler, Yellow-throated Spurfowl, and the tiny Pygmy Falcon, though bird activity is generally low at this time of day.

The afternoon is dedicated to searching for bustards in the grasslands. After careful scanning, we are rewarded with Buff-crested Bustard and White-bellied Bustard, both offering stunning views. We also note Somali Fiscal, Red-billed Hornbill, and Black-headed Lapwing.

The wildlife doesn't disappoint today—besides the birds, African Golden Wolf crosses the road, a Beira Oryx stands proudly on the savanna, and Salt's Dik-diks dart between the acacia trees. With an impressive list of sightings, we wrap up the day, looking forward to another full day in this region tomorrow.

DAY 4: Aledoghi National Park

At 6:15 AM, everyone is ready to head toward Aledoghi National Park. We make a short stop at our scout's post for breakfast. Fresh bread and strong coffee are served, while Jan pulls out jars of jam, peanut butter, and chocolate spread. After that, we set off into the park.

Aledoghi NP is known for its bustards, but they take their time to appear. We drive through the vast landscape, not spotting a single bustard at first. Luckily, there are plenty of other birds to keep us busy. Our first stop provides an immediate spectacle—hundreds of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse fly overhead, and later, we get an excellent ground view of them. We also find White-headed Buffalo Weaver, our first White-crowned Bush Shrikes of the trip, and two Black-throated Barbets. In an acacia tree, a Green-winged Pytilia gives us a great view.

Above us, countless eagles circle, with Steppe Eagles particularly abundant. The harriers are also thriving here, especially Montagu's Harriers, which appear in large numbers.

As we continue searching for bustards, an unexpected sighting grabs our attention—a Scissor-tailed Kite flying alongside our vehicle. A dream bird for many! At first, only a few in the group manage to see it, but then it returns, soaring spectacularly overhead. What an incredible bird!

Further along, another special raptor appears—a Secretarybird striding proudly across the savanna. From our vehicles, we get amazing views of this bizarre yet fascinating bird.

After more searching, we finally spot our first bustards of the day—first White-bellied Bustards, and eventually, our main target species: the Arabian Bustard. Right before lunch, we get an excellent view of this rare and locally occurring bird!

We enjoy lunch under the shade of a large acacia tree as the day's heat reaches its peak. When the temperature starts to drop, we explore a wetter section of the park, where we discover a Black Scrub Robin that presents itself beautifully to the group. At a small waterhole, a Blue-throated Bee-eater is spotted, and for the first time, we get a clear view of the Northern Carmine Bee-eater, while a few Grivet's Monkeys curiously observe us.

Unfortunately, part of the park is closed for security reasons, so we decide to head back to the hotel early. On the way, we pass a dead dromedary, where several vultures are feasting. Lappet-faced, White-backed, Rüppell's, and Hooded Vultures fight for the best spot at the carcass.

Aside from the birds, mammals also make an appearance today. We add Warthogs, Gerenuk, and Soemmerring's Gazelles to the list.

With yet another impressive list of sightings and a successful search for the Arabian Bustard, we conclude this fantastic day in Aledoghi NP!

DAY:5 Awash – Adama

Today is another full day in Awash National Park, though it starts a little differently than planned. A portion of the park is closed off by the military, preventing us from entering early. Despite intense negotiations by Jan and Elias, there's no choice but to turn back. We make the best of the situation and have breakfast on the street, enjoying delicious fresh bread and strong coffee before heading to another accessible part of the park. Here, rangers must accompany us, but their presence does not interfere with our experience. We begin the day searching for a regional specialty, but Gillet's Lark remains elusive. Luckily, there are plenty of other beautiful birds to spot. Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Olivaceous Warbler, White-bellied Canary, and various sunbird species are all well observed. While admiring a stunning Somali Bunting, Elias excitedly calls us over—he's spotted a Three-banded Courser! Everyone gets fantastic views of this stunning bird, making it an absolute highlight of the morning.

A little later, we discover more savanna species, including Desert Cisticola and the breathtaking Rosy-patched Bushshrike, which reveals itself both visually and vocally. Today also brings another sighting of an Arabian Bustard, possibly even more spectacular than yesterday's. Not long after, we come face to face with an even bigger bustard—the Kori Bustard! What a giant bird.

It's a morning full of surprises, and just as we pause to watch an African Golden Wolf, one of us spots movement on the other side of the vehicle—a Courser! After careful observation, we confirm two Double-banded Coursers, accompanied by at least three chicks. An extraordinary sighting!

At a stunning viewpoint overlooking the Awash River, a sudden call rings out—Verreaux's Eagle! A highly sought-after species for many in the group. Unfortunately, it disappears before everyone gets a good view—a bit of a disappointment. We decide to wait, hoping it will return. Our patience pays off—fifteen

minutes later, the dark eagle flies back, allowing the entire group to enjoy an excellent view. A pleasant surprise and a wonderful addition to our trip list!

We have lunch at a spot where we make one last attempt to find Gillet's Lark, but without success. To end the day, we visit the impressive Awash Falls, taking a brief touristic break. Beneath the waterfall, massive Nile Crocodiles wait patiently for prey. With a fantastic list of sightings, we conclude a great day in Awash NP.

In the evening, we drive one and a half hours southwest to Adama, where we spend the night, saving us some extra distance tomorrow.

DAY: 6 Adama – Awassa

Today, we have a journey through the Rift Valley, with stops at several bird-rich lakes along the way. Our first stop is Lake Ziway, where we immediately make some great sightings. At a small pond, dozens of Collared Pratincoles are gathered, and a tree full of weaver nests reveals the presence of Village Weavers. Our only Grey-headed Kingfisher of the trip appears briefly, and among the familiar migratory birds, we discover Whinchat, Bluethroat, and Yellow Wagtail, including a Balkan Wagtail. A surprising find is a Siberian Stonechat, an uncommon winter visitor in Ethiopia. We also spot our first Lilac-breasted Rollers of the trip, while Grey-backed Shrikes and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters pose beautifully for photos.

At our next stop, near the village of Ziway, birdwatching becomes a bit challenging due to the large group of curious children walking alongside us. Despite this, we manage to spot a Brown-throated Wattle-eye while navigating through the crowd and the Marabou Storks.

A bit further in a quieter area, we see a Black Heron, famous for its unique hunting technique—spreading its wings like an umbrella (or secretly playing a game of “Night time, Day time”).

An unexpected bonus here is an impressive Goliath Heron, the largest heron in the world.

Our last stop before lunch is on the lake shore, bustling with wading birds. Other exciting sightings include White-cheeked Tern, White-winged Tern, and an African Openbill flying overhead.

After a great lunch in Ziway, we continue to Lake Langano, where we visit an abandoned hotel, a well-known location for spotting rare species. The search doesn't take long: we immediately find both Slender-tailed Nightjar and Greyish Eagle Owl.

The nightjars are right in front of us, and as we search more carefully, we keep discovering more. In the end, we count no fewer than eight! Their camouflage is phenomenal, making it an incredible experience to see them up close.

The Greyish Eagle Owls are on their usual perch, and one of them even has prey in its talons. Owls are always fascinating!

We continue adding more species to our growing bird list. A Black-billed Scimitarbill and a Striped Kingfisher provide excellent views, and one of the participants spots a White-winged Tit while photographing a Red-throated Wryneck.

By late afternoon, we need to keep moving to reach Awassa before dark. Just before the city, we make a short stop by the lake, where we enjoy watching a group of hippos resting close to shore.

After navigating some detours, we finally arrive after dark at our hotel, the best accommodation of the trip. A fantastic day full of birds and diverse scenery through the Rift Valley!

DAY:7 Awassa – Kibre Mengist – Dilla

We once again start at 6:15 AM, beginning with a walk in the park opposite the hotel, which is located by Lake Awassa.

Before long, we spot Silvery-cheeked Hornbills, and in the trees, we see Guerezas, stunning black-and-white monkeys with long, fringed tails. Near the water, we come across a Black Crake, and additional species we add to our list include the near-endemic White-rumped Babbler, Double-toothed Barbet, Red-faced Cisticola, and Little Weaver.

After an hour of birdwatching, we return to the hotel for breakfast.

Today's journey is long, but has a special purpose—searching for the very locally occurring Prince Ruspoli's Turaco, perhaps Ethiopia's most beautiful endemic bird.

Since the road conditions are poor, and we must cover over 200 kilometers, we can only make limited stops along the way. But before we even set off, an unexpected delay arises—a missing phone causes stress.

We methodically search every possible spot while calling the number—no ringtone from a jacket, no buzzing from a suitcase. We return to the room to thoroughly check everything again—still nothing. The last possibility? The suitcase. We turn everything upside down, even opening the toiletry bag. A second later, someone triumphantly holds up the phone—"But I never put it in there!"—Well, apparently, you did.

We joke about "Mr. Alzheimer playing tricks on us again," but thankfully, the search ends with relieved laughter.

With some delay, we begin the long journey. Along the way, we make a brief stop as a White-headed Vulture circles above the road. In the middle of a small village, where we instantly draw attention, we admire this striking vulture as it puts on a spectacular show above us.

After about four hours of driving, we reach Kibre Mengist, a well-known location for the Prince Ruspoli's Turaco. Upon arrival, the landscape looks rather unremarkable, despite this species' extremely limited distribution range. Finally, we stretch our legs and begin our search.

The first birds we encounter are great additions to our list: Red-headed Weaver, White-browed Robin-Chat, White-winged Cliff-Chat, and Black-headed Oriole. But soon, our attention shifts—a pair of bright red wings flashes between the trees—it's the Prince Ruspoli's Turaco! With patience, we eventually get three birds in fantastic view. Their whitish crest, vivid orange "eyelashes," and shimmering green plumage make this an incredibly striking species to see. Observing a bird with such a small global range feels extra special.

After an hour of enjoying this endemic species, we drive back to Kibre Mengist for lunch. Along the way, we spot another Ethiopian endemic, the strangely shaped Thick-billed Raven.

On the long drive back to Dilla, we stop a few times, including a sighting of an African Woolly-necked Stork walking along the roadside. Since the return trip takes another four hours, we arrive after dark at our beautiful lodge in Dilla.

A small disappointment—our well-deserved beer is not available here. But even with a cola, we happily toast to the successful sighting of the Prince Ruspoli's Turaco, the undisputed highlight of the day

DAY8 : Dilla – Yabelo – Mega Road

We begin the day with an early breakfast in our beautifully situated lodge in Dilla, while Guerezas and Olive Baboons move through the trees surrounding the restaurant—a lovely way to wake up.

Before departing, we spot a large group of Black Saw-wings, and a few Black-headed Orioles hidden among the branches. Then, it's time to head south.

On our way to Yabelo, we make a short stop to observe two Ethiopian Thrushes. As we continue driving, the landscape changes, and we enter savanna territory. At the first stop, we once again see a Verreaux's Eagle, though not as spectacularly as a few days ago.

Since we are now in a completely different habitat from earlier in the trip, we immediately start spotting new species. White-crowned Starlings fly past, and a small group of Grey-headed Silverbills provides an unexpected but delightful surprise during our first stop.

Since we arrive early in Yabelo, we decide to drive a portion of the Yabelo-Mega Road. This road is known for hosting many of the specialties of southern Ethiopia.

Our first stop along this road immediately delivers a D'Arnaud's Barbet. Less than 200 meters further, we find our only Red-and-Yellow Barbet of the trip, characteristically perched atop a termite mound.

We have lunch in a dry riverbed, and while the bread, fruit, and other supplies are unpacked, bird sightings keep coming. A Spotted Morning-Thrush sings beside the vehicles, and in the riverbed, a Bare-eyed Thrush forages. During lunch, we spot a Northern Brownbul, and an adult Bateleur soars overhead.

After lunch, we explore the surrounding area on foot, walking between the acacia trees. This results in an amazing mixed flock, including Acacia Tit, Pygmy Batis, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Banded Parisoma, Northern Crombec, and Brown-tailed Apalis.

One of us glimpses a group of White-crowned Helmeted Shrikes, but unfortunately, they remain invisible to the rest of the group.

We continue along the Yabelo-Mega Road, which provides even more fantastic species. We spot another Three-banded Courser, while Northern Grosbeak Canary and Yellow-bellied Eremomela offer excellent views.

Then, suddenly, we hear an unfamiliar call. After scanning the area, we spot a Vulturine Guineafowl! And not just one—a group of about 40 birds walks just a few meters away from us.

Out of nowhere, the flock erupts into the air, flying directly over us before crash-landing several hundred meters away. A bizarre but breathtaking sight!

Our final planned stop of the day delivers two fantastic species. First, we find a pair of Purple Grenadiers, stunningly colored birds that provide excellent close-up views and photos alongside several Chestnut Sparrows.

Next, we spot a Red-naped Bushshrike, a highly sought-after species that we manage to see perfectly. Just as we are relishing the remarkable sightings, a moment of panic arises—a room key has gone missing!

A quick check of pockets and bags turns up nothing, but someone vaguely remembers seeing "a few keys" lying somewhere in the car.

After a short search, the room key reappears—wedged between the seats.

A sigh of relief and some laughter follows... It seems like a recurring theme on this trip—birdwatching and finding lost items!

DAY 9: Yabelo – Mega

In the heart of Yabelo, we not only savor the food but also experience the everyday life of Ethiopia—the charm of simplicity!

After breakfast, we drive southward, heading toward the Kenyan border, in search of the specialty birds of this region. Our guide Elias reassures us, saying there's no need to worry—despite their small distribution range, they are surprisingly common here. And he turns out to be right!

At our first stop of the morning, we quickly find the remarkable Stresemann's Bush Crow. It remains a mystery why this species has such a limited range, as they appear to be intelligent, opportunistic birds (after all, they belong to the crow family) and have a varied diet.

A 2012 study suggests that this may be due to a "climate-envelope model"—the species seems strictly dependent on very specific climate conditions, which act as an invisible barrier, including certain temperatures and low humidity levels.

Even if vegetation elsewhere appears suitable, the species cannot establish itself there. Truly fascinating to observe them here, and we enjoy watching two birds foraging calmly.

Not much later, we find another Ethiopian endemic, the White-tailed Swallow. Possibly, this species is also restricted by the same climate bubble, though much less research has been done on them.

Another theory suggests their reliance on traditional Borana huts for nesting could limit their spread, as they depend on human structures to survive—an unusual trait for a species with such a small range.

Regardless, it is extraordinary to see two of Ethiopia's most unique bird species in one morning!

Other notable species recorded here include Chestnut Weaver, Grey-capped Social Weaver, and Black-capped Social Weaver.

Our hotel does not serve breakfast—in fact, the term "hotel" hardly applies, as it resembles a prison more than accommodation. Nevertheless, the beds are fine, and some of us even manage to get a warm shower!

Since there's no breakfast, we turn to Ethiopia's street food culture, where the best meals are often found right outside.

This morning, we sit down at Big Mamma's, a woman who runs her small business with firm authority. Seated in her chair, she commands her staff, while fresh bread, coffee, and tea are served.

As we eat, we watch life unfold around us:

- A goatherd leading his flock past the stalls
- A group of children giggling as they eye our cameras and binoculars
- A long row of tuk-tuks queuing at the gas station across the street

After breakfast, we continue toward Mega, where we explore the "Mega Triangle."

The conditions are extremely dry, making birding slow-going. We search for Coursers, but fail to find them. However, we do spot a Tiny Cisticola, Foxy Lark, and Bearded Woodpecker, though overall, birds are scarce.

While driving across the savanna, we encounter a group of Gerenuks (also called Giraffe Gazelles). Their unusual build makes them a truly fascinating species to see!

Before finding a lunch spot in Mega, we spot three White-bellied Bustards and a magnificent Kori Bustard. We leave the windows down, and upon arriving in the village, we hear a sparrow-like call, which turns out to be a group of Shelley's Rufous Sparrows!

Our lunch stop is at the southernmost location of our trip, where we are joined by beautiful Bristle-crowned Starlings.

After a delicious cup of Ethiopian coffee, we drive the Mega Triangle again, but only manage to add one new species—our only Pectoral-patch Cisticola of the trip.

On the return drive toward Yabelo, the day seems to be winding down—until, suddenly, from the first vehicle, two glossy starlings with long tails are spotted—Golden-breasted Starling!

This species had been practically written off, but luckily, they don't fly far, settling in a nearby tree, allowing everyone to admire them up close.

As twilight approaches, we make one last attempt to find Donaldson's Smith Nightjar.

It takes a while, but once darkness fully sets in, multiple birds begin to sing. From time to time, we catch glimpses of individuals flying past—a perfect ending to the day.

DAY 10: Yabelo – Wondo Genet

After another breakfast in Yabelo, we head toward the Yabelo Sanctuary, where we immediately spot a new species—the Wattled Lapwing, a bird that is difficult to find in Ethiopia but more common elsewhere in Africa.

A bit further along, a Lilac-breasted Roller presents itself beautifully for photographs, while a group of Scaly Chatterers flies by.

A short stop north of Yabelo doesn't add many new species, though we attempt to relocate a Golden-breasted Starling that flew past—but without success. Fortunately, we had a fantastic sighting of this species yesterday, or the search would have been more stressful!

After that, we face a long drive toward Wondo Genet.

After five hours on the road, we arrive at our destination, a lush green oasis after the dry landscapes of the past few days. Upon arrival, we immediately head into the hills for a walk. After such a long journey, it feels wonderful to be back among the birds.

We quickly record Ethiopian Oriole, Little Sparrowhawk, Black-winged Lovebirds, the colorful African Firefinch, and the less colorful Black-and-white Manakin.

The absolute highlight of the day is a Narina Trogon! This beautiful species is often well hidden, but today it provides an incredible view.

We end the afternoon walk with an Abyssinian Woodpecker and a less-than-perfect sighting of a Brown Parisoma, perched high in a tree.

As a joke, this unremarkable KBV (Kleine Bruine Vogel) is declared the “bird of the trip.” The walk proves to be a perfect conclusion to the day.

Tomorrow, we hope for another bird-filled adventure!

DAY 11: Dinsho – Goba – Bale Mountains

The day begins early with a walk in the hills around Wondo Genet, accompanied by the melodious calls of Ethiopian Orioles.

Our main goal this morning is the elusive Abyssinian Ground Thrush, a difficult-to-spot species. After several failed attempts and only brief glimpses, we are finally rewarded—a bird appears in full view! What a stunning creature, with its bright orange plumage and subtle white eye-ring.

Other new species this morning include Abyssinian Thrush, Mountain Wagtail, and a group of White-cheeked Turacos.

Although more common than the Prince Ruspoli's Turaco from a few days ago, they are no less spectacular. With patience, we manage to get an excellent view of them. At the hot springs, we make another attempt to find the African Wood Owl. It takes some effort, but eventually, we spot two individuals high up in the tree. While dozens of Ethiopians bathe in the warm pools, we stand nearby with binoculars, scopes, and cameras, admiring these owls in an unusual setting!

A Giant Kingfisher makes for a nice bonus sighting.

After a good breakfast at the hotel, we continue our journey toward the Bale Mountains—a new (and quite literal) highlight of the trip!

Upon arrival in the mountain village of Dinsho, a local guide awaits us. He leads us to a roosting site for the Cape Eagle Owl, though reaching it is no easy feat.

After a steep climb, he points out an owl, but it's not the species we were expecting—another African Wood Owl! This time, however, it is much more visible than the one we saw at the hot springs.

Our surprised reactions amuse the guide—we had been expecting a Cape Eagle Owl!

Luckily, things soon turn in our favor. A bit further along, he directs us to a juvenile Cape Eagle Owl, still covered in downy feathers.

The adult remains out of sight, but this young bird is already an incredible find.

The third owl species of the day—the endemic Abyssinian Owl—remains elusive.

However, our guide promises to do his best to locate their roosting tree for our return visit in two days.

We arrive in Goba after dark, where we spend the night..

Along the way, we stop several times, adding a few remarkable species to our list, including Ethiopian Thrush, Rusty-breasted Wheatear, and Black-winged Lapwing.

As we drive higher into the mountains, the landscape transforms completely.

At a small pool at high elevation, we immediately encounter a series of new species.

One of the first birds to stand out is the Rouget's Rail, a remarkable Ethiopian endemic.

Unlike most rails, this species is far from shy, offering us great views.

A bit further on, we discover two more endemics—the Blue-winged Goose and the Spot-breasted Lapwing, both exclusive to the Ethiopian highlands.

Additionally, this site provides our only sightings of African Snipe and African Black Duck on this trip.

DAY 12: Bale Mountains

Today, we experience the literal high point of the trip—a visit to the Sanetti Plateau, an impressive highland over 4000 meters in elevation.

Warm clothing is essential, as temperatures can be quite chilly at this altitude!

We start the day on the slopes of the Bale Mountains, where we quickly find the endemic Abyssinian Catbird.

Then, we drive to the national park entrance. At the gate, we immediately record an Abyssinian Longclaw and a group of Ethiopian Siskins—both endemics.

As we ascend further, we soon add Chestnut-naped Francolin and Ethiopian Cisticola to our list.

The Sanetti Plateau is extremely dry. At the end of the dry season, almost all pools and wetlands have disappeared, significantly reducing our chances of seeing a Wattled Crane.

Fortunately, the dry conditions do not affect our chances of spotting the Ethiopian Wolf, so we scan the plateau from our vehicles—but we must be patient.

We stop for lunch at a dried-up lake, sheltered by the rocks.

At 4100 meters elevation, we feel the effects of altitude, so we take it slow.

During lunch, we see several Giant Mole Rats emerging from their burrows in search of food.

They are massive creatures, with strangely large heads!

Across the plateau, various rodents dart back and forth—this must be paradise for the Ethiopian Wolf, though we still haven't spotted one.

Then, right after lunch, the moment finally arrives!

In the distance, we spot an Ethiopian Wolf, calmly walking through the landscape, toward the road.

We quickly drive to the spot where we anticipate it will emerge, and we get incredible luck—not one, but two wolves appear, walking right next to our vehicles! What an unbelievable sighting!

The wolves cross the road, wander between our vehicles, and begin hunting rodents on the other side—a magical moment.

This species is definitely a strong contender for the "best bird of the trip!"

Our continued search for Wattled Crane—as expected—yields nothing, aside from more spectacular scenery.

By mid-afternoon, we decide to descend again.

We pause briefly at the Abyssinian Catbirds, where we also spot a Cinnamon Bracken Warbler, Rüppell's Robin-chat, and White-backed Black Tit—excellent additions to our list.

With the phenomenal Ethiopian Wolf encounter fresh in our minds, we wrap up this unforgettable day.

DAY 13: Bale Mountains – Lake Langano

We conclude our stay in this unique region by spotting Bohor Reedbucks, Warthogs, and the Mountain Nyala, a species found exclusively in the Bale Mountains—a perfect farewell to this incredible landscape.

The journey to Lake Langano is long, and we spend most of the day covering kilometers.

Upon arriving at our beautifully located lodge, we are fortunate to start birdwatching immediately.

Our first target is Clapperton's Spurfowl, though only two members of the group manage to see it.

Despite this, the evening excursion is delightful, with a few more wonderful sightings.

At the lodge, we are directed to two roosting Greyish Eagle Owls, which once again provide excellent views.

Along the cliffs near the lodge, Red-throated Rock Martins—a new species for this trip—fly alongside Mosque Swallows.

With the stunning backdrop of Lake Langano, we end a long yet rewarding travel day.

Tomorrow marks the final day, as we search for a few last specialties!

Early in the morning, we receive news that our local guide in Dinsho has located the Abyssinian Owl, so after breakfast, everyone is eager to depart.

Along the way, we make another successful attempt to find the Brown Parisoma, as the subspecies here (possibly a future split) is different from the one we observed earlier.

And we succeed!

At an abandoned restaurant, we quickly find the "Bale Parisoma" (ssp. *griseiventris*).

Upon arriving in Dinsho, we pick up our guide, and after a steep climb, he points out an Abyssinian Owl,

perched at eye level in a pine tree.

This rare endemic allows fantastic views, while Brown Woodland Warblers sing loudly around us.

Since we are near the roosting site of the Cape Eagle Owl, we take another look—and this time, we are lucky!

We spot an adult bird, a stunning addition to our already impressive owl list.

After this successful owl-watching session, we must continue our journey, as we will spend the night in the Rift Valley, near Lake Langano.

Before leaving the highlands, we take in a few more memorable mammal sightings.

Along the road, we observe:

Day 14 : Lake Langano- Debre Zeit to Addis Airport.

We start the day with a walk around the lodge, and this time, everyone is lucky—a group of Clapperton's Spurfowl provides great views!

An unexpected surprise is a Klaas's Cuckoo, offering close-up observation. This shiny green cuckoo is a spectacular addition to our list. Among the shrubs, we discover smaller birds, including Red-faced Crombec, White-Bellied Canary, Rattling Cisticola, Little Weaver and Buff-bellied Warbler.

Back near our rooms, we find a Red-throated Wryneck, while two Red-bellied Parrots forage on the ground. The highlight of the morning is a stunning African Pygmy Kingfisher, which poses perfectly for photos.

Breakfast at the lodge turns out to be underwhelming, so we opt to eat in the nearby village. Plastic chairs are quickly gathered, fresh bread is fetched, and our trusty jars of jam, peanut butter, and chocolate spread appear from the vehicles.

A friendly local woman soon brings us a delicious cup of Ethiopian coffee. Simple, but delightful—another charming local experience!

After breakfast, we drive into Abiata-Shalla National Park. We try once more to find Verreaux's Eagle Owl, but this owl refuses to join our final owl celebration. However, we come across a few extremely tame Somali Ostriches and add Crimson-rumped Waxbill to the list.

Our last owl search of the trip does, however, prove successful—thanks to local residents, we find two Northern White-faced Owls, hidden deep within an acacia tree. What a fantastic little owl!

We continue toward Lake Abiata, where Marabou Storks gather in huge numbers. Many species we saw earlier at Lake Ziway are present here as well. Among the Marabous, a Black-crowned Crane strolls, and among the Grey-headed Gulls, we spot a few Black-headed Gulls, our last “new” species of the trip. This location provides a perfect moment to simply relax and appreciate the birds before the journey comes to an end.

After an hour drive, we reach Ziway, where we have late lunch. From there, we head toward Debre Zeit, returning to the lodge where we spent our first night. Here, we take time to repack for the return flight and freshen up. During dinner, we take the time to thank our guides, Elias and Jan, and our drivers, Teddy and Getachew—they have done a fantastic job leading us through this stunning country!

Before departing for the airport to catch our midnight flight, we enjoy a beer while reminiscing about our trip's highlights. In total, we have recorded 435 species!

Everyone submits their personal top five, resulting in a shared list of “the best birds of the trip” - though somehow, the Ethiopian Wolf is missing!