

Birding trip to Ethiopia, December 2011



Birding team in Debre Libanos

Participants:

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Arrival Addis Ababa airport: 2 December 2011, 02:30 hours

Day 1: 2 December 2011



Map 1. First day's itinerary by car from Addis Ababa, through Sululta plains towards Debre Libanos, with approximate locations of birding stops indicated

Arrival at about 2:00 at Addis Ababa airport, we spent a rather frustrating couple of hours at the customs, trying in vain to convince the officials to let me bring in my telescope and discovering to our dismay that most of the luggage from the Madrid travellers had remained behind in Istanbul. At least all the turmoil I caused while struggling with Ethiopian bureaucracy helped my companions to smuggle in their scopes without anyone paying attention. Apparently, some curious law exists that requires tourists to bring along a special permission for introducing and using optical materials like telescopes in Ethiopia. Of course we were not aware of this law because, unfortunately, the authorities do not bother with informing people about this. Anyway, the official told us that at office such-and-such in Addis Ababa, the required permit could be obtained the next day. Teresa, a Huescan girl working at an Addis Ababa based NGO and awaiting us, because all of us were supposed to bring her some school stuff and cloths for the abandoned children she is working with, promised to try and get me the permit the next day, so that when tomorrow we were to be scheduled back at the airport (to recollect the lost luggage) we might also get back my telescope... Welcome to Africa...

At 6:00 hours in the morning, after a virtually completely sleepless night, we birded the immediate surroundings of the hotel Lalibela, situated close to the airport. The surroundings consisted of some gardens of rather high trees, some of them with flowers and fruits, attracting several flocks of passerines. Overhead, even before breakfast at 8:00, already quite a lot of raptors soared past. As usual in a foreign country, identification of the birds was a bit troublesome, particularly so for the *Streptopelia* doves, which are, at least superficially, rather similar to the unaccustomed eye. Among the early risers we saw:

- Brown-rumped Seedeater *Serinus tristriatus*, at least 15 ind. foraging quietly low in the bushes and on the ground; an endemic for the Horn of Africa
- Pied Crow *Corvus albus*, over 30 ind. flying overhead
- Mountain Thrush *Turdus (olivaceus) abyssinicus*, 8 ind. quietly calling and feeding
- Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius parasitus*, at least 16 ind. soaring low and searching for food

- Thick-billed Raven *Corvus crassirostris*, 3 ind., 2 of which landed together on one of the higher buildings and started some apparent courtship feeding; this species is one of the most spectacular and common endemics of the country
- Swainson's Sparrow *Passer swainsonii*, quite abundant, quietly uttering typical sparrow-like 'chirps' and apparently occupying the typical House Sparrow niche
- Dusky Turtle-dove *Streptopelia lugens*, at least 13 ind.
- Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*, abundant all over the place
- Ring-necked Dove *Streptopelia capicola*, at least 2 ind.
- African Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*, 1 female, 1 male, spectacularly close with its elongated tail streamers
- Blue-winged Goose *Cyanochen cyanoptera*, 2 ind. passing overhead, another endemic species
- Montane White-eye *Zosterops poliogastrus poliogastrus*, a rather large flock of some 15 ind. actively foraging in the tops of the flowering trees
- Tacazze Sunbird *Nectarinia tacazze*, at least 2 males and 1 female feeding on the flowers in the trees; a relatively long-tailed dark-plumaged sunbird
- Speckled Mousebird *Colius striatus*, 4 ind. foraging in the midst of the trees, often upside down and half-hidden
- Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus schoanus*, several ind.
- African Citril *Serinus citrinelloides*, 1 or 2 ind.
- African Mourning Dove *Streptopelia decipiens*, at least 1 ind.
- Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*, at least 10 ind.
- Streaky Seedeater *Serinus striolatus*, 1 ind.
- African Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta*, at least 1 ind.
- Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*, some small flocks of up to 6 ind. passing overhead
- Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*, 2 immature birds overhead
- Little Swift *Apus affinis*, some 10 ind. in a close flock
- Nyanza Swift *Apus niansae*, at least 1 ind. well enough seen to be identified
- Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*, at least 5-10 ind. soaring low
- White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*, at least 12 ind. relatively high overhead
- Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, at least 3 imm. birds, mingling with the resident Yellow-billed Kites
- Common Fiscal *Lanius collaris*, 1 male
- Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, 1 or 2 feeding among the foliage
- Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, at least 1 ind.
- White-collared Pigeon *Columba albitorques*, some single birds flying by; an endemic pigeon species
- Buff-bellied Warbler *Phylolais pulchella*, at least 1 ind. seen by Juan Carlos and Silvia
- Brown Parisoma *Parisoma lugens*, 1 ind. close to the hotel entrance by Javier Train and Dani

After a rather poor 'continental' breakfast, just consisting of some toasts and marmalade, we were all set for leaving, but the guide and the four Toyota Landcruisers, with their respective drivers, did not appear until rather later. Finally, at about 9:30, we left and set out north (see map above) in the direction of the Sululta plains on our way to Debre Libanos. Between Addis Ababa and the first stop on the Sululta plains, we saw from the car:

- Thick-billed Raven, 1
- Pied Crow, several
- Yellow-billed Kite, c. 35
- White-backed Vulture, c. 10
- Speckled Pigeon
- Dusky Turtle-dove
- Groundscraper Thrush *Psophocichla litsitsirupa*, 6

Then, at the first stop, at about 2800 m altitude, in a flat open countryside overgrown with grasses and other low herbs and some occasional slow-flowing streams and still waters, we did our first serious field birding. This provided us with:

- Sacred Ibis, 11
- Augur Buzzard *Buteo augur*, 6

- Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, 3
- Wattled Ibis *Bostrychia carunculata*, 10 ind. feeding in the fields; an interesting endemic species of ibis
- Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, 10
- Willow Warbler, 5 ind. feeding in a small bush
- White-collared Pigeon, 4
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*, several 100s calling and feeding all over the place
- Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, well over 100 ind. calling and feeding
- Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*, 3
- Red-breasted Wheatear *Oenanthe bottae*, at least 3 ind., a remarkable, rather big and upstanding wheatear
- Common Crane *Grus grus*, 3 ind. calling and flying by
- Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*, 1 ind. light phase
- Cape Rook *Corvus capensis*, c. 20
- White-backed Vulture, c. 30
- Yellow-billed Kite, c. 45
- Pied Crow, widespread in single or small flocks
- Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, c. 25 feeding low over the fields; close examination was required for correct identification
- Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*, 1
- Moorland Chat *Cercomela sordida*, 2

Soon afterwards, we made a second stop (see map above), this time close to some bushes and some low buildings. Most of the terrain here, however, was also quite open and even steppe-like landscape, with some higher terraces and a meandering very slow-flowing brook. Generally, the vegetation consisted of low herbs and grasses and some haystacks were raised by local farmers. The following birds were seen:

- Barn Swallow, c. 25 on a wire
- Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*, at least 1 ind.
- Greater Blue-eared Starling *Lamprolornis chalybaeus*, a small flock of less than 5 ind.
- Black-headed Siskin *Serinus nigriceps*, 2 males, 1 female, 1 juvenile; yet another endemic canary species
- Mosque Swallow *Cecropis senegalensis*, a small flock of these spectacularly large swallows
- Erlanger's Lark *Calandrella erlangeri*, at least 7 ind. perfectly seen; spectacularly singing and displaying; another intriguing endemic bird
- Moorland Chat, 2
- Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush *Monticola saxatilis*, 1 male, causing an initial confusion for being mistaken for its smaller congener Little Rock-thrush
- Pectoral-patch Cisticola *Cisticola brunnescens*, 3 ind., causing quite some difficulty in identification... those cisticolas really resemble each other
- Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*, 10 ind., one of the more spectacular new birds for me...
- Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*, at least 3 ind., one of which carried food for apparent nestlings
- Common Fiscal, 2
- Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, at least 1 adult
- Tawny Eagle, at least 4
- Rock Martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*, some ind.
- Scandinavian Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) thunbergi*, at least 1 adult male
- Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola*, c. 40
- Blue-winged Goose, 4
- Abyssinian Longclaw *Macronyx flavicollis*, 2 ind. perched on a haystack
- Yellow-billed Duck *Anas undulata*, 2 in the small brook
- Grassland Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus*, several ind. seen by some
- Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*, at least 2 ind. calling

While having an authentic Ethiopian lunch in a village restaurant somewhere between the 3rd and the 4th birding stop on the Sululta plains, we spotted a fine adult Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*, for the Pyrenean birders among us a comfortingly familiar sight.

After lunch, we resumed our way and continued birding from the cars. We saw:

- Yellow-billed Kite, c. 50
- Pied Crow, c. 50
- Speckled Pigeon, frequent sightings
- Common Fiscal, 2
- White-backed Vulture, 20
- Cape Rook, some singles
- White-collared Pigeon, frequently small flocks

Then we made the 3rd stop (see map) of the day, close to a small wetland area with a moist pasture and a small pond fringed with marshland vegetation. Here we saw:

- Wattled Ibis, 6
- Sacred Ibis, 2
- Augur Buzzard, 1
- Black-winged Lapwing *Vanellus melanopterus*, c. 15
- Yellow-billed Duck, 54
- Blue-winged Goose, 6
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* cf. *flava*, 100s
- Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) feldegg*, c. 20, distinctive, rather more rasping calls and several males in fine breeding plumage
- Red-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus erythrorhynchus*, c. 15 ind. feeding on the backs of 2 horses
- Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, 1
- Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, 1 female
- Garganey *Anas querquedula*, 1 female
- Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*, 1
- Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*, 1
- Red-throated Pipit, c. 30
- Thekla Lark, 2
- Cattle Egret, c. 60

Then, some time later, we made a sudden stop (the 4th on the map above) because of the presence of a carcass at just a mere 25 metres from the road (probably a cow), which was attended by a mixed flock of vultures:

- Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*, 6 impressive birds, threatening the other smaller vultures as well as ourselves as we descended from the cars and tried to approach the birds for better pictures
- Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppellii*, 6 ind.
- White-backed Vulture, 10 ind.

At the same spot, we also found:

- Red-breasted Wheatear, 1 female
- Groundscraper Thrush, some ind.
- Tawny Eagle, at least 2 ind.
- A curiously patterned, apparently large and dark *Aquila* eagle that we initially identified unanimously as an Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, 1 immature, spectacularly close on a telephone post, with us right beneath it! Nonetheless, based on the pictures taken of it, the real raptor experts later doubted our ID, attributing the observation rather to an atypically patterned immature Tawny Eagle...
- Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, 1 female, 1 male
- Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, 1 female
- Augur Buzzard, 1
- Thekla Lark, c. 10
- Dusky Turtle-dove, at least 1 ind.
- Cape Rook, 3
- Common Fiscal, 1

- Isabelline Wheatear, 1

Then, on the road towards the monastery of Debre Libanos, on a slightly sloping terrain scattered with low trees and bushes and quite close to the impressive gorge of the Rift Valley, we came across a large group of:

- Gelada *Theropithecus gelada*, c. 150 ind., with just a few adult males, a lot of females with young and quite a few subadult males; exceptionally tame
- Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus*, c. 70
- Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*, 1 probably immature ind., only seen in bad light and far away by Jesús and Maarten
- Tree Pipit, 1 calling
- Lammergeier, 1 adult
- Common Fiscal, 1
- Pied Wheatear, 1 male
- Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*, 1
- buzzard spec., 1
- Baglaffeht Weaver *Ploceus baglaffeht*, c. 10
- Speckled Mousebird, 2
- Rüppell's Vulture, 11

We then returned to get established at our hotel, Ethio-Germany Park Hotel (see map), situated right on the edge of the steep cliffs that flank the Rift Valley here, offering spectacular views towards the north and east. The altitude here is slightly more than 3000 m above sea level. The last activity before sundown was a short walk from the hotel down to the so-called 'Portuguese bridge', birding the cliffs and the bushes growing on top of them and along the path:

- Tacazze Sunbird, at least 2 ind.
- Dusky Turtle-dove, 12
- Montagu's Harrier, 1 female
- Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, 1
- Northern Crombec *Sylvietta brachyura*, 1
- White-backed Vulture, several ind. flying overhead and 1 pair of adults at nest with a very small, downy chick
- Rüppell's Vulture, some overhead
- Rüppell's Black Chat *Myrmecocichla melaena*, 1
- Rock Hyrax *Procavia capensis* subsp., 1
- Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus*, 1
- Rock Martin, c. 10
- Hemprich's Hornbill *Tockus hemprichii*, 2 ind. seen and calls heard
- White-billed Starling *Onychognathus albirostris*, c. 10
- Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys*, 1
- Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, 1 at the foot of a waterfall
- Swainson's Sparrow, some ind.
- Mountain Wagtail *Motacilla clara*, 1 ind. at the foot of a waterfall
- Stout Cisticola *Cisticola robustus*, 1
- Red-cheeked Cordonbleu *Uraeginthus bengalus*, 1 female
- Nyanza Swift, c. 10
- Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi*, 1 male singing seen by Jesús
- Spotted Creeper *Salpornis spilonotus*, 1 ind. seen by Juan Carlos

Then, finally, after a very well-spent first day and a well-deserved supper, we reluctantly crept into our very cold beds, after having agreed on meeting us again the following morning at dawn in order to look for the local francolins.

Day 2: 3 December 2011



Map 2. Itinerary of morning activities on 2nd day: the walk from the hotel to the Portuguese bridge and the walk in the forest next to Debre Libanos monastery

After an extremely cold night – I woke up in the middle of the night shivering and trembling and was unable to get back to sleep before having trembled so much, generating warmth, that I actually got stiff muscles all over – we were actually rather glad to get out of bed early at the break of day. Very closely wrapped into our warmest clothes and jackets we set out again for the Portuguese bridge, said to be one of the best points in the early morning to hear and see Erckel's Francolin. This proved to be very true, because the calls already became apparent as soon as we approached the bridge and then we saw them too. Observations on this early morning walk:

- Erckel's Francolin *Pternistis erckelii*, 2 adults with 2 chicks seen, later at least 3 more ind. calling
- Rüppell's Black Chat, 1
- Mocking Cliff Chat *Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris*, 1
- White-winged Cliff Chat *Thamnolaea semirufa*, 1

Surprisingly the three rather similar chat species very closely together at the pool (foot of waterfall) beneath the Portuguese bridge.

- Swainson's Sparrow, at least 5
- Brown-rumped Seedeater, at least 6
- Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, at least 1 ind. at foot of waterfall
- Yellow-billed Kite, 8
- Montagu's Harrier, 1 female
- Willow Warbler, 9
- Stout Cisticola, 3
- White-billed Starling, 1 male, 1 female
- Speckled Mousebird, 5
- Dusky Turtle-dove, abundant, one pair observed copulating
- Common Fiscal, 2
- Baglaffeht Weaver, c. 50
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, 7
- Yellow-bellied Waxbill *Coccyzygia quartinia*, 1 male
- Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala*, at least 1 ind. seen by Dani
- Montane White-eye, 2

- Streaky Seedeater, 1
- White-backed Vulture, c. 15
- Lammergeier, 1 adult
- Rock Martin, c. 50
- Common Bulbul, 6
- Steppe Buzzard, 1
- Nyanza Swift, c. 10
- Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, 1 male, 1 female
- Tacazze Sunbird, c. 15
- Verreaux's Eagle, 1 adult, discovered far away by Fernando, but in good light and approaching, finally offering excellent views, particularly for those that hurriedly went down again from the hotel's terrace
- Abyssinian Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus monacha*, 1 ind. calling (not seen)
- Fan-tailed Raven, c. 10
- Lanner Falcon, 1
- Tawny Eagle, 3 imm.
- Augur Buzzard, 1
- Mottled Swift *Apus aequatorialis*, several ind.
- Common Swift *Apus apus*, several ind. by Alberto Bueno
- House Martin *Delichon urbicum*, c. 25 ind. in one flock moving southward along the edge of the cliffs
- European Turtle-dove *Streptopelia turtur*, 1 ind.
- Variable Sunbird, 1
- Speckled Pigeon, 3

Then, after breakfast – this time also consisting of a scrambled egg, thus being rather more satisfying than yesterday's breakfast – we went to the Debre Libanos monastery to visit the quite intact montane forests there. On the way there, some of us spotted again the group of Geladas. At arrival at the monastery, we were amazed at the immense amount of local people there, visiting the monastery. But, particularly the hard-core birders among us, quickly turned our attention back to the birds. We saw here:

- Abyssinian Black-headed Oriole, at least 1 ind., also photographed by Jaume
- Abyssinian Woodpecker *Dendropicos abyssinicus*, 1 male, photographed by Jaume
- African Grey-headed Woodpecker *Dendropicos spodocephalus*, 1 ind. seen by Javier Train
- Red-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus pusillus*, 1 calling and 1 photographed by Jaume and by Pilar
- Fan-tailed Raven, 4
- Scarlet-chested Sunbird *Chalcomitra senegalensis*, 1
- Banded Barbet *Lybius undatus*, 1
- Mountain Buzzard *Buteo oreophilus*, 1 ind., offering good enough views from below to safely tell it apart from Steppe Buzzard
- Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher *Melaenornis chocolatinus*, 1
- Variable Sunbird, 1 male, 1 female, 5 unsexed ind.
- Brown-rumped Seedeater, several ind.
- Mountain Thrush, 4
- Augur Buzzard, 1
- Black-winged Lovebird *Agapornis taranta*, 2 calling and flying overhead
- Montane White-eye, 4
- Great Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucus*, 1 adult cf. female flying close overhead
- African Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter minullus*, 1 adult, roosting in the fork of a tree
- Brown Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*, 2 ind. seen and calls heard
- Blue Rock-thrush *Monticola solitarius*, at least 2 ind. seen by Alberto Bueno and others
- Hemprich's Hornbill, 1 calling
- African Paradise-flycatcher, 2 males, 1 female
- Rüppell's Robin-chat *Cossypha semirufa*, 7
- large falcon, 2 ind., seemed quite light-coloured and rather compact with relatively short tails, silhouette more like Peregrine than like Lanner; possibly Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*, but better left unidentified...

- Brown-throated Wattle-eye *Platysteira cyanea*, at least 1
- Black-headed Batis *Batis minor*, 1 ind. seen by at least Jesús and Javier Train
- Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura*, 2
- Common Crane, at least 2 ind. calling overhead, not seen
- Speckled Mousebird, several
- Streaky Seedeater, 1
- Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, 1



Red-fronted Tinkerbird Pogoniulus pusillus at nest, Debre Libanos (Pilar Díaz)

Because of the very well-spent morning at the Portuguese bridge, the hotel precinct and the Debre Libanos forest, we spent so much time that the return to Addis Ababa had to be fast and without any significant birding or even lunch stops, along the same route as indicated on map 1 of yesterday. On the road, birding from the car, we still managed to see:

- big eagle spec., 1 dark, rather upright stance on a phone post; possibly another (but older) Eastern Imperial Eagle (but we did not stop to check...)
- Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, 1 adult male
- Red-billed Oxpecker, 4 ind. on a donkey's back
- Pied Crow, several
- Yellow-billed Kite, at least 41
- Sacred Ibis, 2
- Hamerkop, 1 seen by Jesús
- Cape Rook
- White-backed Vulture, 11

Already within Addis Ababa:

- Grivet Monkey *Cercopithecus aethiops*, 1 ind. dead on the road
- Yellow-billed Kite, 35
- Abyssinian Ground-hornbill *Bucorvus abyssinicus*, 1 perched on a dead tree
- Tawny Eagle, 1 imm.
- Hooded Vulture, 1

Then, back at the airport to recollect the luggage lost. In general, we were quite successful at this, but unlucky Fernando's luggage still remained in Istanbul (or so we had to assume). The poor Teresa had spent a significant part of yesterday visiting several offices in order to obtain a permit for my introduction of a telescope into the country, but had found no-one prepared to

give her any permit at all or even any written proof of their refusal, so, almost in desperation, she had prepared an official written statement of her NGO, taking full responsibility for the entire matter. We sincerely hoped that by this letter we could convince the custom's officials to allow me to actually get back my 'scope. In vain... they were as stubborn as any of the many donkeys seen these two days and we seemed to be talking and reasoning to some human walls... So, I had to make do without my telescope.

All in all, also because the drivers had some stuff to arrange with the cars, we spent quite a considerable amount of time at the airport, before resuming the rest of our trip southward. We amused ourselves with some very confident Yellow-billed Kites that actually approached us down to less than a few metres in their efforts to snatch away some French fries spilled by us in a hurried and improvised outdoor lunch on the airport's parking lot. Ornithological observations here included:

- Common Fiscal, 1 male, 1 female
- Tacazze Sunbird, 2
- Montagu's Harrier, 1 female
- Swainson's Sparrow, 5
- Dusky Turtle-dove
- Brown-rumped Seedeater, 2
- Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*, 16 flying overhead
- Tawny Eagle, 9 imm. flying overhead
- Sacred Ibis, 1

Then, finally, at about 14:00, we set out southward towards Ziway. We now clearly descended into the Rift Valley, until about 1000 m above sea level. From the car, and during a very short sanitary stop (not marked in map 3) we saw:

- White-backed Vulture, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 64
- Pied Crow, widespread singles and small flocks
- Dusky Turtle-dove
- Tawny Eagle, 2
- Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*, 1
- Marabou Stork, 35
- smaller falcon spec., 1 ind. rather close, but unfortunately too short view to identify the species with any certainty...
- Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia*, 2 ind. together
- Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, 1 adult
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* cf. *flava*, c. 25
- Hooded Vulture, 1
- Barn Swallow, c. 35
- possible African Hobby *Falco cuvieri*, too briefly and badly seen for certain identification
- Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, c. 25 in a close flock
- Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, 3
- possible Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, 1 too briefly seen and too far off for certainty



Map 3. Itinerary of afternoon of day 2, en route from Addis Ababa to Ziway (Rift Valley) with a short stop at lake Koka

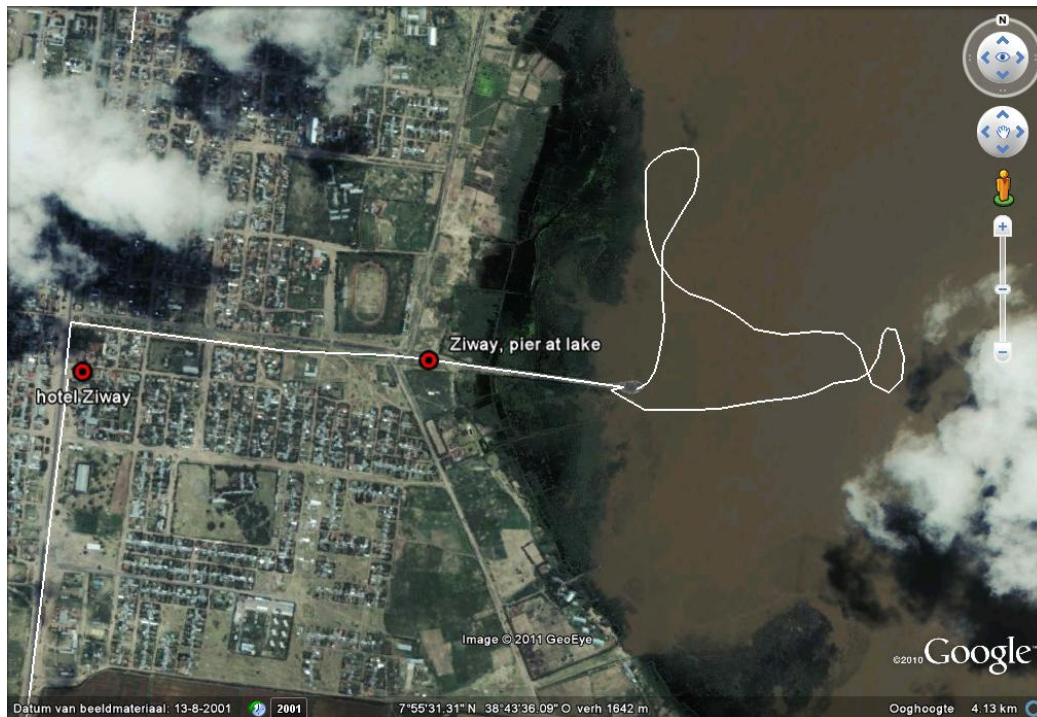
Then, at dusk already, we made a brief stop at lake Koka. Because of the rather heavy traffic on the road, the stop was quite uncomfortable and also the wavering light rendered accurate birding slightly more difficult than desirable. Nonetheless, we succeeded in registering the following birds here:

- Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*, 1
- African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus*, c. 25
- African Spoonbill *Platalea alba*, c. 25
- Spur-winged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis*, 2
- Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, c. 10
- Long-tailed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus*, 6
- Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*, 1
- Red-billed Duck *Anas erythrorhyncha*, c. 15
- Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*, c. 10
- African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*, at least 1
- Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, 2
- Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, 1
- Ring-necked Dove, 1
- Great Egret, 2
- Hadada Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash*, 1
- Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, c. 25

A bit further south, from the car, we still saw a flock of 16 Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*.

Finally, at about 20:00 and pitch-dark, we arrived at the hotel Mola Lavaqqa in Ziway. Here we finally obtained a dinner that pleased everyone of us, even those that do not like their food too spicy. A drawback here, however, was the failure of electricity when we were calling today's checklist. While some of us still went out at night to a neighbouring bar (where an aggregate provided electricity), others went to bed early, now to enjoy a rather more comfortable night, thanks to the lower altitude and the higher temperature.

Day 3: 4 December 2011



Map 4. Itinerary of walks and a small boat trip in the early morning (4 December 2011) between the hotel Ziway, the dust road to the pier and the pier itself

Before breakfast, a few of us made a short tour close to the hotel, but soon after breakfast the cars took us to the pier of Ziway. This area is a riparian wetland area along the shallow shoreline of an immense lake. Small pools, more or less covered with *Juncus*, sedges, reed and other helophytic vegetation are interspersed with mud, but also patches of trees and shrub are present. Birds abound everywhere and are remarkably tame. At the end of the pier, we took a small slow boat to cross over to a nearby island where a mixed colony of large marshland birds was established in some flooded trees.

Near the hotel and at the lakeshore from the pier of Ziway (map 4) we saw:

- Speckled Mousebird, c. 40
- Dusky Turtle-dove
- Marabou Stork, at least a 150 birds, very confident, many of them occupying (low) tree nests, estimate of c. 250 ind. around the pier
- Sacred Ibis, c. 25
- Hamerkop, abundant all over the place, some nests seen, estimate of c. 250 ind. around the pier
- Cattle Egret, at least 35
- Yellow-billed Kite, at least 12, also copulation seen
- Red-eyed Dove, present
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, 2
- Daurian/Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, 1
- Egyptian Goose, 16
- Common Bulbul, 3
- Reichenow's Seedeater *Serinus reichenowi*, at least 1
- Plain Martin, c. 10
- Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, 2
- White-browed Sparrow-weaver *Plocepasser mahali*, c. 30
- Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*, 10
- Pied Wheatear, 1
- Sand Martin, c. 30
- Cape Rook, some loose ind.

- Speckled Pigeon, c. 25
- Beautiful Sunbird *Cinnyris pulchellus*, 6
- Common Chiffchaff, 2
- African Mourning Dove, 1
- Black-headed Batis, 1 male, 1 female (hotel's 'garden')
- African Dusky Flycatcher, 1
- Hooded Vulture, c. 5
- Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, 15
- Black-winged Stilt, c. 30
- Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, 5
- Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, 1 ind., causing some confusion, but definitely with not enough white in outer tail feathers to be considered even a possible African Snipe
- Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, c. 20
- Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, c. 15
- African Fish Eagle, 4 adult, 12 imm., 5 unaged ind., birds calling all the time
- Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*, c. 25
- Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, 1 female flying over, seen by Dani and Maarten
- Three-banded Plover, 5
- White-faced Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna viduata*, c. 50
- Common Sandpiper, 4
- African Jacana, c. 35
- Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*, 2
- Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, 10
- Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) feldegg*, at least 12
- Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, 3
- Northern Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicus*, at least 18 ind., spectacularly coloured and some very close views of perched and hunting individuals



Northern Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicus* near lake Ziway (Pilar Díaz)

- Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala*, 2
- Grey Heron, 1
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* cf. *flava*, several
- Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus*, c. 10
- African Darter *Anhinga rufa*, c. 5
- Black-headed Gull, c. 10
- Grey-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus*, 1 1st winter ind.
- Double-toothed Barbet *Lybius bidentatus*, 3 ind., spectacular birds quite high in the surrounding willows

- Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis*, 2 ind. resting in a pool
- Glossy Ibis, 4
- Squacco Heron, 1
- Long-tailed Cormorant, 2 adult, 2 imm., 10 unaged birds
- Barn Swallow, frequently small flocks hunting low above the palustrine vegetation
- Laughing Dove, some ind.
- Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra*, 2 adult, 1 imm.
- Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, c. 12, 1 calling
- Intermediate Egret, 1
- Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*, 1 ind. seen by Jesús
- Malachite Kingfisher *Alcedo cristata*, c. 15
- Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, c. 50
- Western Marsh Harrier, 2 female
- Spur-winged Goose, 2
- Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*, 1 2nd winter ind. a little far away, seen from the boat by Maarten
- Lesser (Baltic) Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus*, 4 2nd winter, 1 3rd winter and 2 adults, from the boat
- Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus*, attending the island colony
- Black-headed Heron, attending the island colony
- African Darter, attending the island colony
- Sand Martin, several ind. foraging around the colony
- Sacred Ibis, attending the island colony
- Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, 10 in colony
- White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, 2 winter plumaged adults, from the boat
- Grey-headed Gull, 1 adult from the boat
- Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius*, at least 3 adult ind. on the northern edge of the boat trip (see map 4), among aquatic vegetation patches
- Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*, 1 ind., from the boat



***Hippopotamus* *Hippopotamus amphibius* looking at us suspiciously during our boat trip on lake Ziway (Juan Carlos Albero)**

Then, back on the pier:

- Common Chiffchaff, 1 singing

- Pied Kingfisher, 6
- White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, some ind. calling
- Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, 2
- African Pygmy Goose *Nettapus auritus*, 1 male, 1 female, swimming quietly among the rushes
- Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, at least 1 or 2 ind. singing (also seen)
- Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, at least 1 or 2 singing (not seen)
- African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ceyx pictus*, 1 ind.
- Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*, 1 ind. seen by Juan Carlos
- Rüppell's Starling *Lamprolornis purpuroptera*, 2
- White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis*, 2 ind. seen by Jesús



Map 4. Itinerary late morning, 4 December: going south from Ziway to the Sabana Beach Resort on the western bank of lake Langano, making a brief birding stop in the acacia savanna, where we visit a spectacular canyon

Then, we continued further south. The landscape had, by now, changed dramatically and we drove through a relatively flat savanna, quite densely overgrown by acacias. On our way to the Sabana Beach Resort Hotel, our official next stop (see map 5), we made a brief stop near a spectacular canyon, which cut deeply through the savanna. There we saw:

- Yellow-billed Kite, 8
- Superb Starling *Lamprolornis superbus*, c. 45
- Rock Martin, 25
- Black-billed Wood-hoopoe *Phoeniculus somaliensis*, 5
- Grey-backed Fiscal *Lanius excubitorius*, 4
- Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, 3
- Abyssinian Black Wheatear *Oenanthe lugubris*, 3
- Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus*, 1 adult roosting on a branch in the canyon cliff
- Yellow-bellied Waxbill, 2
- Olive Baboon *Papio Anubis*, c. 25 ind. with several young
- Plain Martin, at least 5
- Eastern Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus larvatus*, 1 male
- Northern Crombec, 3
- Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens*, 1
- Red-billed Buffalo-weaver *Bubalornis niger*, 1 seen by Juan Carlos
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* cf. *flava*, c. 10

- Pied Wheatear, several
- Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, 1
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Hooded Vulture, 1
- Abyssinian Ground-hornbill, 1 male, 1 female, 1 unsexed ind.
- Northern White-crowned Shrike *Eurocephalus rueppelli*, 2
- Namaqua Dove, 1
- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna (pallida) elaeica*, 1
- Swainson's Sparrow, several
- Chestnut Sparrow *Passer eminibey*, 4 ind.
- Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, 1 adult
- Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*, 1

We then reached our official stop at the Sabana Beach Resort, a hotel and restaurant on the lake Langano shore with a spectacular garden, just full of extremely confident and interesting birds. We had lunch here and afterwards some local chaps showed us around and found us some of the ornithological highlights of the area. We saw:

- Black-winged Lovebird, one flock from one of the cars
- Superb Starling, c. 25
- White-browed Sparrow-weaver, c. 15
- Red-fronted Barbet *Tricholaema diademata*, 1 ind. seen and photographed by Jesús
- Slender-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus clarus*, 1 ind., roosting right on the ground at our very feet
- African Paradise-flycatcher, 1 female
- Rüppell's Starling, c. 10
- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, 1
- African Mourning Dove, present
- Black-headed Batis, 1
- Beautiful Sunbird, several
- Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, c. 10
- Northern Black Flycatcher *Melaenornis edoloides*, 1
- Spectacled Weaver *Ploceus ocularis*, 1
- Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, 1 female
- Common Sandpiper, 2
- Great Cormorant, 4
- African Fish Eagle, 2
- White-winged Tern, 13
- Grey-headed Gull, 7 adult, 1 1st winter
- Common Bulbul, 1
- Sacred Ibis, 5
- White Wagtail, 2
- Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, 1 female
- Great Egret, 1
- Blue-headed Wagtail, 1 male
- Steppe Buzzard, 1
- Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, 1
- Greyish Eagle Owl *Bubo cinerascens*, 2 roosting in trees; dark eyes very prominent
- Eurasian Hoopoe, 2
- African Harrier-hawk *Polyboroides typus*, 1 adult, roosting quietly in a tree, extremely close and confident
- African Orange-bellied Parrot *Poicephalus rufiventris*, 1 male, 1 female
- Little Rock-thrush *Monticola rufocinereus*, 1 male, 1 female
- White-bellied Go-away Bird *Corythaixoides leucogaster*, 2 males, 1 female, 1 unsexed ind., very close, together in one tree
- big fruit-eating bat, at least 4 ind. roosting inside a hollow palm tree
- Namaqua Dove, 1 male
- Red-throated Wryneck *Jynx ruficollis*, 1 ind., offering spectacular views
- Tacazze Sunbird, 1
- Speckled Mousebird, present
- Marabou Stork, 2

- Striped Kingfisher *Halcyon chelicuti*, 1
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, 1
- Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*, seen by the occupants of one of the cars, while leaving the Sabana Beach Resort's precincts

From lake Langano we drove further south to Wondo Genet (see map 5). Along the road, still leading mainly through acacia savanna, with the landscape gradually becoming greener and with more montane vegetation, we saw:



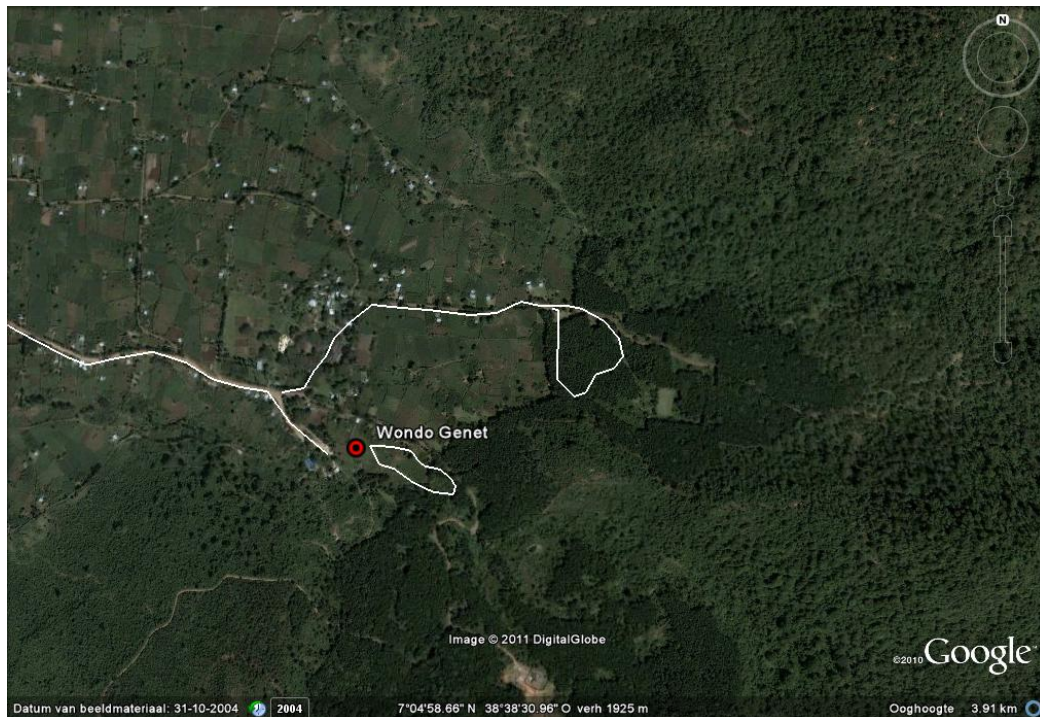
Map 5. Itinerary 4 December, afternoon, going south from lake Langano and rising in elevation from about 1000 m above sea level to over 2000 m

- cf. Cape Hare *Lepus capensis*, 1 ind. crossing the road, close to lake Langano
- Spur-winged Lapwing, 2
- Superb Starling, abundant in acacia savanna
- Pied Crow, scattered individuals and small flocks
- hawk spec., 1 ind. rather long-tailed and long and relatively broad wings, no definite identification possible due to short glimpse
- White-browed Sparrow-weaver, several
- Yellow-billed Kite, 5
- Hooded Vulture, 2
- Laughing Dove, a few
- Abyssinian Roller, 2

Arriving at Wondo Genet, just at the brink of dusk:

- Silvery-cheeked Hornbill *Bycanistes brevis*, 2 males, 1 female, 7 unsexed ind.
- Scarlet-chested Sunbird, 1 male, 1 female, 1 unsexed ind.
- Grivet Monkey, several very confident ind. near hotel
- Beautiful Sunbird, 2
- Tacazze Sunbird, 2
- Hooded Vulture, 10
- Woodland Kingfisher, 2
- bat spec., several calling after sundown

Day 4: 5 December 2011



Map 6. Map indicates two areas, the southernmost walked twice in the morning (before and after breakfast) and the northernmost near the Forestry University Compound in a rather untouched stretch of montane forest

The early morning before-breakfast walk, starting at around 5:30 and accompanied by two local guides, covered the southernmost route indicated in map 6. It is a fine valley forest, surrounded by some mountain ridges, and interspersed with frequent clearings. Unfortunately, people are actively exploiting the forest for timber and probably other uses, but for the time being we still could bird the area with relative ease and good success. The pre-breakfast walk provided:

- Scaly Francolin *Pternistis squamatus*, at least 1 ind. calling (not seen)
- Variable Sunbird, 8 singing
- Rüppell's Robin-chat, 2 singing, 2 seen
- heron spec., 1 ind. passing by in a glimpse, probably Grey Heron
- Common Bulbul, 4 singing
- Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, c. 15, also calling
- Abyssinian Black-headed Oriole, 2 singing
- Half-collared Kingfisher *Alcedo semitorquata*, 1 perched by the side of the path
- Guereza Colobus *Colobus guereza*, at least 18, among which at least 1 adult male
- Nyanza Swift, c. 25
- Mountain Wagtail, 2 singing in duet
- Red-winged Starling *Onychognathus morio*, 2
- Black Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne pristoptera*, at least 36
- Little Rock-thrush, 3
- Thick-billed Raven, 3
- Tambourine Dove *Turtur tympanistia*, 1
- Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica*, 3
- Ethiopian Boubou *Laniarius aethiopicus*, 1 singing and seen, 5 only singing
- Woodland Kingfisher, 1
- African Paradise-flycatcher, 1 male, 1 female
- Abyssinian Ground-thrush *Zoothera piaggiae*, 1 rather far away on the slope of the cliff
- Blue-breasted Bee-eater *Merops (variegatus) lafresnayii*, 2
- White-rumped Babbler *Turdoides leucopygia*, 3

- White-cheeked Turaco *Tauraco leucotis*, 4
- African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus*, 1 calling (not seen)
- Red-eyed Dove, several calling
- Mountain Thrush, 1
- Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, 2
- Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, 1
- African Hill-babbler *Pseudoalcippe abyssinica*, 2 calling (not seen)
- Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus chrysoconus*, 1 calling (not seen), 1 seen and photographed by Jesús
- Montane White-eye, 2 unaged ind., 1 adult with a recently fledged young
- Lemon Dove *Aplopelia larvata*
- Brown-throated Wattle-eye, 2, of which at least 1 male
- African Grey-headed Woodpecker, 2
- Yellow-fronted Parrot *Poicephalus flavifrons*, 2
- Sharpe's Starling *Pholia sharpii*, 1
- Little Sparrowhawk, 1 adult male calling
- Black-winged Lovebird, 1
- Common Fiscal, 1 male, 1 female
- Nubian Woodpecker *Campethera nubica*, 1
- Speckled Mousebird, 1
- African Citril, 1 calling
- Scarlet-chested Sunbird, 1 male
- African Dusky Flycatcher, 1
- Slender-billed Starling *Onychognathus tenuirostris*, a flock of c. 10 ind.
- Blue-headed Coucal *Centropus monachus*, 1
- Wattled Ibis, 1
- Double-toothed Barbet, 1
- Rock Martin, c. 15
- Spectacled Weaver, 1
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 5
- Hooded Vulture, 4
- Tacazze Sunbird, 2
- Beautiful Sunbird, 1
- Common Chifchaff, 1 singing at hotel compound
- Swainson's Sparrow, present

About the same walk after breakfast, now with all participants:

- Wattled Ibis, 1
- African Grey-headed Woodpecker, 1
- Beautiful Sunbird, 1
- African Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus*, 1 soaring overhead
- White-cheeked Turaco, 4
- Rüppell's Robin-chat, 1
- Tree Pipit, 1 calling
- Ethiopian Boubou, 5 singing
- Variable Sunbird, 10
- Northern Puffback *Dryoscopus gambensis*, 1 (this morning another ind. photographed by Jesús)
- Spotted Creeper, 1 ind. offering excellent views, now seen by everybody
- Yellow-billed Kite, 3
- Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, 1
- Long-crested Eagle *Lophaetus occipitalis*, twice an individual overhead, probably two different birds
- Blue-breasted Bee-eater, 1
- Red-headed Weaver, 2 males working on nest
- White-backed Vulture, 1 overhead
- Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike *Campephaga phoenicea*, 1
- Banded Barbet, 3
- Mountain Thrush, 1

- Augur Buzzard, 1 dark phase
- Thick-billed Raven, 7
- Abyssinian Woodpecker, 1 male
- Black Saw-wing, several
- Yellow-fronted Parrot, 2
- Hooded Vulture, 3
- Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor*, 2 (1 calling)
- Red-billed Oxpecker, 6 on tree and on cattle
- Grivet Monkey, abundant
- Guereza Colobus, abundant
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- African Harrier-hawk, 1
- Mountain Wagtail, 1

The afternoon walk took place in the vicinity of Forestry University of Wondo Genet, slightly further north (see map 6). This is one of the very few remaining stretches of intact forest, with some huge age-old trees. Bird activity in the afternoon was a bit disappointing, all being very silent. Nonetheless, we found:

- Woodchat Shrike, 1 adult
- Verreaux's Eagle, 1 immature overhead
- Abyssinian Black-headed Oriole, at least 8 birds calling and showing off
- Olive Baboon, 3 ind., of which 1 adult male
- Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, 4
- White-backed Vulture, 29
- Thick-billed Raven, 2
- African Paradise-flycatcher, 1
- Yellow-fronted Parrot, calls heard
- Red-eyed Dove, singing
- Yellow-billed Kite, 5
- Mountain Thrush, 1
- African Grey-headed Woodpecker, 1 male, 1 female
- Little Sparrowhawk, 1 immature perched in the fork of a tree
- Narina Trogon *Apaloderma narina*, 2 ind., offering excellent views and fulfilling the guide's promise
- Verreaux's Eagle Owl, 1 near nest, shown by local guides
- Guereza Colobus, 2
- Scaly Francolin, 1 ind., showing a fleeting glimpse



Group picture of satisfied observers, after having found *Narina Trogon Apaloderma narina* (Juan Carlos Albero)

Back at the hotel, after dinner (between 22:10 and 22:30), we play the calls of Montane Nightjar *Caprimulgus poliocephalus* along the path. After a while, at least 2-3 individuals respond.

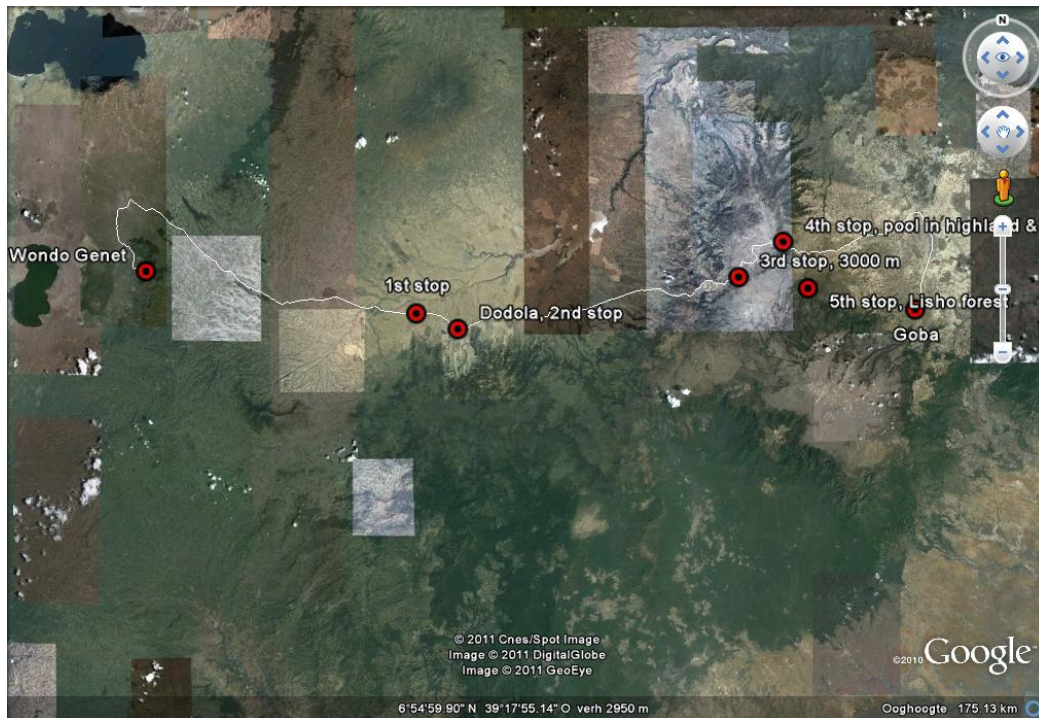
Day 5: 6 December 2011

During a short walk on my own, before breakfast, from 5:45 onwards near Wondo Genet hotel, accompanied by a local boy, who kindly indicated some of the interesting birds, I saw:

- Montane Nightjar, 2 calling
- Variable Sunbird, several, at least 1 male, 1 female
- Red-eyed Dove, several
- Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, 34
- Common Bulbul, a few
- Little Sparrowhawk, 1
- Hadada Ibis, 2 flying by
- Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, 1
- Streaky Seedeater, 1 singing, 2 more seen
- Mountain Wagtail, 1
- Slate-coloured Boubou *Laniarius funebris*, 1
- White-cheeked Turaco, 1
- Black-winged Lovebird, 1
- Northern Puffback, 1 male, 1 female
- Bronze Manakin *Lonchura cucullata*, 2
- Pale Prinia *Prinia somalica*, 1
- Swainson's Sparrow, several
- Mountain Thrush, 1
- Plain Martin, several
- African Paradise-flycatcher, 1 male
- Brown-rumped Seedeater, 2
- Blackcap, 1 female

- Lesser Honeyguide, 1
- Hooded Vulture, c. 5

After breakfast, we set out from Wondo Genet to the Bale Mountains National Park, according to the route set out in map 7.



Map 7. Itinerary from Wondo Genet, via Dodola up to Lisho forest en Goba, Bale Mountains, with birding stops and lunch stop (in village Dodola) indicated; gradually ascending to well over 3200 metres above sea level

Between Wondo Genet and the 1st birding stop we saw from the cars:

- Speckled Mousebird, 2
- Blue-breasted Bee-eater, 1
- Common Fiscal, 4
- Common Bulbul, 1
- Pied Crow, 1
- Hooded Vulture, 39
- Speckled Pigeon, several
- Yellow-billed Kite, 28
- Thick-billed Raven, 6
- White-backed Vulture, 2
- Black Kite, 1
- Nyanza Swift, 2
- Laughing Dove, 1

At our first stop, at about 2800 m above sea level, we found ourselves once again on a highland semi-alpine plateau with cattle, low grass and herb vegetation and some moist land.

Birds included:

- Thick-billed Raven, 5
- Black Kite, 2
- Yellow-billed Kite, 28
- Blue-breasted Bee-eater, 1
- Laughing Dove, 4
- Common Fiscal, 1
- White-backed Vulture, 15
- Hooded Vulture, 4

- Speckled Pigeon, 2
- Pied Crow, 25
- Red-billed Oxpecker, 22 mostly on cattle
- White-collared Pigeon, 9
- Rock Martin, several
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, c. 45
- Sacred Ibis, 3
- Cape Rook, 38
- Red-throated Pipit, 8
- Red-breasted Wheatear, 6
- Thekla Lark, 1
- Red-rumped Swallow, 3
- Wattled Ibis, 14
- Egyptian Goose, 2
- Isabelline Wheatear, 1
- Long-billed Pipit, `
- Cattle Egret, 1
- Wood Sandpiper, 1
- Groundscraper Thrush, 1
- Black-winged Lapwing, c. 25
- Pied Wheatear, 3
- Common Kestrel, 3
- Montagu's Harrier, 1 female
- Dusky Turtle-dove, some
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Common Fiscal, 1

At the second stop, near Dodola and in Dodola itself, for lunch, we saw:

- Augur Buzzard, 2
- Common Kestrel, 4
- Common Fiscal, 1
- Tawny Eagle, 2 on dead Cape Hare, 1
- Pied Wheatear, 3
- Red-breasted Wheatear, 1 female
- Thekla Lark, 1
- Erlanger's Lark, 1
- Woodchat Shrike, 1 adult
- Golden Eagle, 1 ind. rather far
- Cape Rook, 3
- Yellow-billed Kite, 85
- Pied Crow, c. 10
- Thick-billed Raven, 4
- Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*, 1 dark phase above the village
- Fan-tailed Raven, 1
- White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, 1 overhead just outside Dodola

After lunch we ascended rather rapidly to over 3000 m, then slightly descended to the next stop (3rd stop on map 7). On the way there we saw:

- Montagu's Harrier, 1 female
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Speckled Pigeon, 4
- House Martin, 2
- Nyanza Swift, 3
- Barn Swallow, several
- African Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus albofasciatus*, 2 males
- Pied Wheatear, 2
- Yellow-billed Kite, 3
- Thick-billed Raven, 1
- White-backed Vulture, 1
- Augur Buzzard, 1

- Lammergeier, 1 adult
- Cape Rook, 1
- Fan-tailed Raven, 10
- Red-billed Chough *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax*, c. 10

At the next stop, close to a tiny crop field, a gorge and in generally open, rocky terrain, we saw:

- White-collared Pigeon, 36
- Pied Crow, 1
- Wattled Ibis, 3
- Tawny Eagle, 2
- Augur Buzzard, 7, 1 dark phase
- Yellow Bishop *Euplectes capensis*, 1 male, 3 females
- Common Kestrel, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 1
- Flappet Lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea*, 1 ind. also photographed by Jesús
- Croaking Cisticola *Cisticola natalensis*, 1
- Streaky Seedeater, 6
- Cape Rook, 10
- Fan-tailed Raven, 7
- Rock Hyrax, 4
- Cape Eagle Owl *Bubo capensis*, 1 at daytime roost, indicated by local girls
- Chestnut-naped Francolin *Pternistis castaneicollis*, 1 calling and seen, far away, discovered by Alberto Bueno
- Wattled Ibis, 1
- Black-headed Siskin, 1 male, 3 females

Then at the next stop, well over 3000 metres, we came across a vegetated pool and a wide, relatively flat pasture beyond, with a little further on a forest edge with grazey vegetation right in front. This was absolutely marvellous, right in the middle of Bale Mountains National Park.

We saw:

- Common Kestrel, 3
- Red-knobbed Coot, 2 adult, 1 pullus, 1 immature
- Blue-winged Goose, 46
- Egyptian Goose, 1 male, 1 female with 2 pulli
- Yellow-billed Duck, 55
- Northern Shoveler, 1 female
- Sacred Ibis, 1
- Spot-breasted Lapwing *Vanellus melanoccephalus*, 90 ind., the endemic lapwing
- Thekla Lark, 1
- Red-throated Pipit, 4 calling
- Wattled Ibis, 6
- Rouget's Rail *Rougetius rougetii*, 1 ind., another endemic species
- Little Grebe, 1
- Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, 1
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, several calling
- Yellow-billed Kite, 2
- Speckled Pigeon, 2 (at 3000 m!)
- Augur Buzzard, 1
- Spotted Hyena *Crocuta crocuta*, 1 dead on the road, an impressive animal!
- Gedemsa (or Mountain Nyala) *Tragelaphus buxtoni*, about 60 individuals quietly grazing on the mountain slope beneath the forest edge, at least 1 adult male, most others females
- Bohor Reedbuck *Redunca bohor*, 1 male among the Gedemsa
- Common Warthog *Phacochoerus africanus*, 28, at least one male, some quite close
- White-collared Pigeon, 14
- African Stonechat, 2 males
- Montagu's Harrier, 2 females
- Pallid Harrier, 1 female
- Groundscraper Thrush, 1

- Thick-billed Raven, 1
- Red-billed Chough, 2

In the Lisho forest, a typical montane forest with quite a lot of clearings, very green and the very centre of the national park, we made a short walk, accompanied by a local guide:

- Dusky Turtle-dove, 1
- Augur Buzzard, 3 (2 light phase)
- Mountain Thrush, 1
- Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, 1
- Pallid Harrier, 4 adult males, impressively beautiful ghost-like appearance
- Gedemsa, c. 45 at quite close range
- Common Warthog, some very close
- Yellow-bellied Waxbill, 4
- Yellow-crowned Canary *Serinus canicollis*, 15
- Streaky Seedeater, c. 10
- Abyssinian Owl *Asio abyssinicus*, 1 at its daytime roost, shown by local guide
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, calls heard
- Ethiopian Highlands Bushbuck *Tragelaphus meneliki*, 1 ind. quite close
- African Wood Owl *Strix woodfordii*, 1 at its daytime roost, shown by local guide
- Brown-rumped Seedeater, 1
- Abyssinian Catbird *Parophasma galinieri*, 1 ind. seen with difficulty, but quite vocal with at least 4 singing individuals
- White-backed Black Tit *Parus leuconotus*, 2 ind.
- Speckled Pigeon, 12



*Artist's impression of Abyssinian Owl *Asio abyssinicus* at daytime roost in Lisho forest, Bale mountains, by Carlos Enriquez*

At pitch-dark, we arrive at the hotel in Goba, slightly higher than our hotel in Debre Libanos, but fortunately a lot warmer inside...

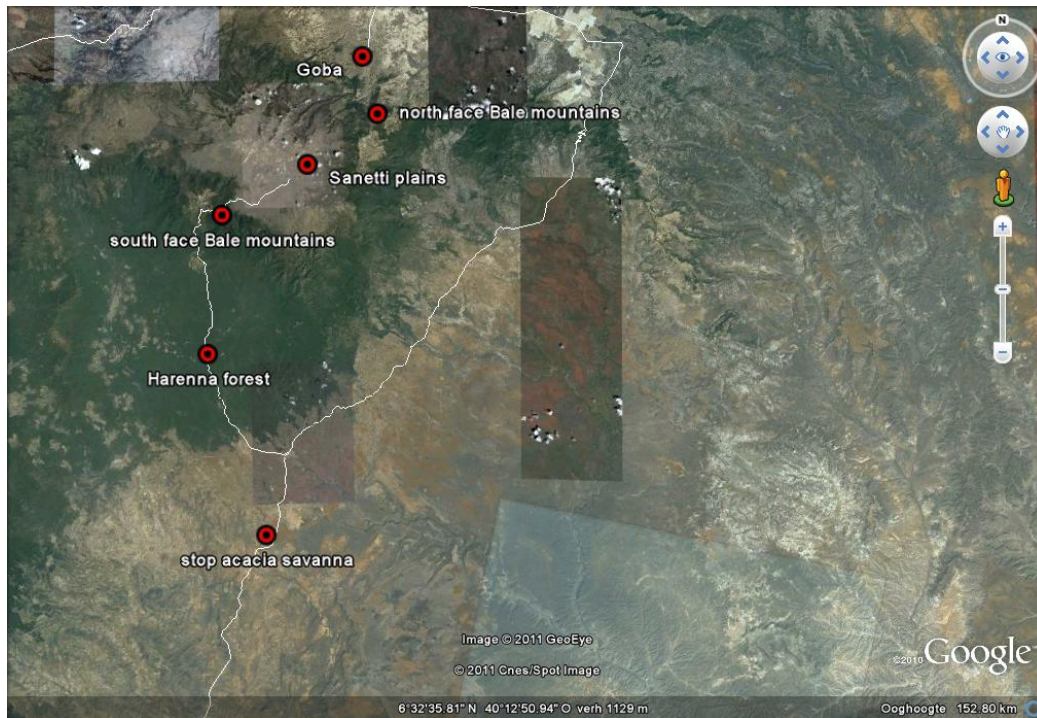
Day 6: 7 December 2011

Just after the early breakfast, in the early light of the morning, while waiting for the drivers, we saw in the garden of the hotel at Goba:

- Speckled Pigeon, several
- Dark-capped Bulbul *Pycnonotus tricolor*, at least 2 ind., clearly yellow-vented, no white cheek markings and a clear-cut contrast between dark breast and white belly
- White-collared Pigeon, 1
- Rüppell's Vulture, 2
- White Wagtail, present
- Common Chiffchaff, 1 singing

- Dusky Turtle-dove, present
- Laughing Dove, present
- Yellow-billed Kite, 1
- Swainson's Sparrow, present

In an absolutely clear weather (clear blue sky) we set out to ascend to the Sanetti plains, the 'altiplano' of the Bale Mountains. We made a prolonged stop on the north face of this climb. The landscape here is characterised by stands of relatively low trees and bushes, interspersed with very green clearings. The terrain is generally slightly sloping, without very steep cliffs, though interspersed with occasional canyons. During this stop, indicated on map 8 as 'north face Bale Mountains', we saw:



Map 8. Itinerary in the morning of 7 December, ascending from Goba to the Sanetti plains (Bale Mountains) and and later descending southward to Haremma forest and then down to a birding stop in the acacia savanna

- Rüppell's Robin-chat, 4
- Abyssinian Catbird, 6 frequently singing
- Mountain Thrush, 1
- Brown-rumped Seedeater, present
- Moorland Chat, 3
- Streaky Seedeater, c. 10
- Yellow Bishop, 2 males, 4 females
- Black-winged Lovebird, 1
- Tacazze Sunbird, 1 male
- Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*, 1
- African Citril, several
- Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, 1 imm.
- Abyssinian Woodpecker, 1 female
- Yellow-bellied Waxbill, c. 15
- Red-eyed Dove, present
- Alpine Swift *Apus melba*, some seen by Jesús
- Thick-billed Raven, 3, one of which attacking a Verreaux's Eagle
- Verreaux's Eagle, a pair of adult birds overhead, one of which was carrying branches in its bill for nest-building
- Augur Buzzard, 1

- Wattled Ibis, 87 now occurring in larger flocks
- Hooded Vulture, 1

Then, after a last, rather steep climb, we finally reached the high Sanetti plateau, now at slightly over 4000 metres above sea level. We now really found ourselves short of oxygen and any fast sprints to get to grips with a new bird were out of the question. We did have to take it easy here! The landscape is really amazing by now: a vast high grassy landscape, gently sloping, with dispersed ponds and pools and meandering streams. Vegetation consists mainly of low green herbs, but the famous giant lobelias are widely distributed and highly characteristic with their phallus-shaped stems. Lots of loose rocks and stones, covered with lichens. The characteristic (and endemic) Giant Root-rats *Tachyoryctes macrocephalus* were running around all over the place, so it is no wonder that here the densities of large raptors were even higher than in the other areas visited so far. These huge rodents also appear to be the main prey of the Ethiopian Wolf, another endemic mammal species of the Bale Mountains. We slowly crossed the Sanetti plains, stopping frequently and birding. The weather remained very good, until we at last came to the south face. There, while descending, we passed through a fog bank, before entering the forest zone. On the Sanetti plains we saw:

- Rouget's Rail, 1
- Tawny Eagle, at least 9
- Cinnamon Bracken Warbler *Bradypterus cinnamomeus*, 1 singing
- Eurasian Hoopoe, 1
- Grassland Pipit, several
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, at least 1
- Lammergeier, 1 imm., 2 unaged ind.
- Moorland Chat, 8
- Chestnut-naped Francolin, 22 adults and at least 4 pulli
- cf. Flappet Lark, 4
- Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, 1
- Fan-tailed Raven, 4
- Blue-winged Goose, 18
- Yellow-billed Duck, 7
- Common Greenshank, 1
- Pallid Harrier, 1 male, 1 female
- White-collared Pigeon, 30
- Thekla Lark, c. 15
- Greater Spotted Eagle, 4
- Egyptian Goose, abundant
- Rüppell's Vulture, 1
- Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, 10 neatly paired, occupying the ponds of still waters in the lowest parts of the plains
- Lanner Falcon, 1
- Starck's Hare *Lepus starcki*, some ind.
- Ethiopian Wolf *Canis simiensis*, 3 ind. at first at very close range, later rather further away
- Black-headed Siskin, 6 males, 3 females
- Augur Buzzard, 6
- Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, 4 adult, 3 immature; incredible density of eagles!

Then, while descending through the fog bank towards the Harenna forest, we saw:

- Thick-billed Raven, 3
- Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk *Accipiter rufiventris*, 1 ind. flying overhead
- Tacazze Sunbird, 1
- Moorland Francolin *Scleroptila psilolaemus*, at least 1 ind. seen by Pilar y Alberto Bueno
- Common Chiffchaff, 1 calling
- Brown Parusoma *Parusoma lugens griseiventris*, 2 singing (only heard)
- Chestnut-naped Francolin, 2 calling
- Eastern Imperial Eagle, 2

In the Hareenna forest (see map 8), the drivers prepared us a lunch (as usual consisting of spaghetti with tomato sauce) and in the meanwhile, we birded the area:

- Augur Buzzard, 4
- Tawny Eagle, 2 imm.
- Yellow-billed Kite, 2
- Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura*, 2 males, 2-3 females
- African Citril, 2 males, one of which singing
- Yellow-bellied Waxbill, at least 22
- Variable Sunbird, 3
- Abyssinian Catbird, 2 singing (only heard)
- Thick-billed Raven, 2
- Grey Cuckoo-shrike, 1
- Baglaffeht Weaver, several
- African Paradise-flycatcher, at least 1
- Abyssinian Crimson-wing *Cryptospiza salvadorii*, 1 ind. seen by Juan Carlos

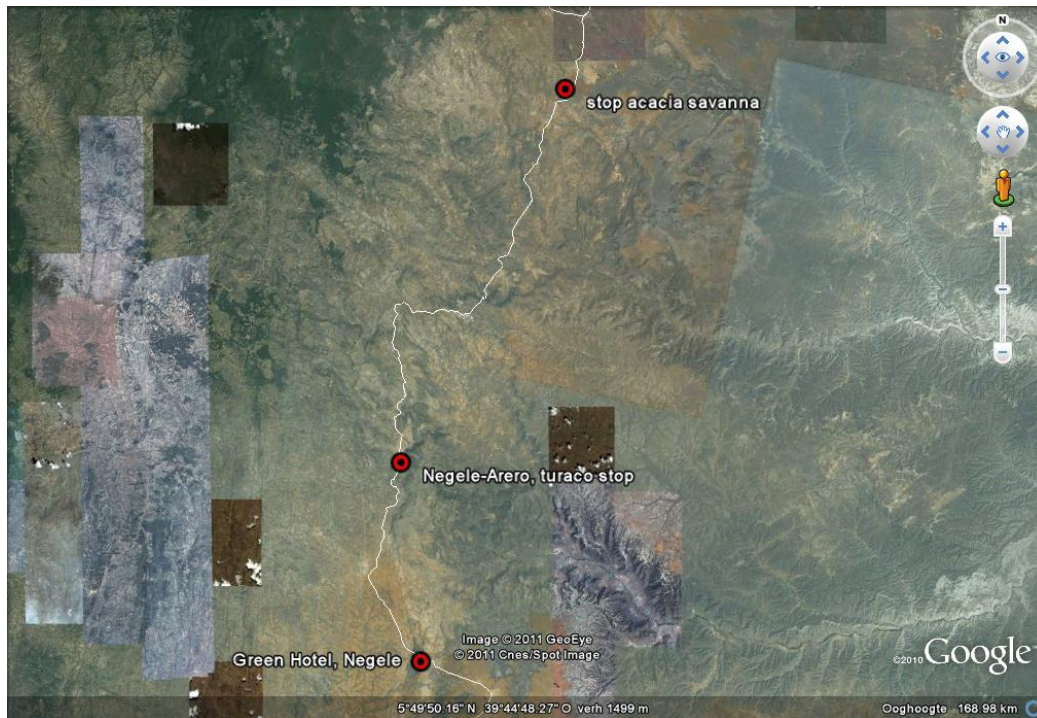
Then we continued descending towards the savanna area. From the cars, still inside the forest, we saw:

- Spotted Hyena, yet another dead ind. along the road
- Tambourine Dove, 4
- Olive Baboon, 5
- Dusky Turtle-dove, present
- Red-eyed Dove, present
- Common Fiscal, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 10
- Hooded Vulture, 3

Then, we made a rather hurried sanitary stop (marked on map 8), which some of the most hard-core birders took advantage of to quickly enter the now predominant acacia savanna landscape, together with our guide Elias, and identified the following birds:

- Superb Starling, at least 31
- Shelley's Starling *Lamprotornis shelleyi*, 1
- Northern Grey Tit *Parus thruppi*, 2
- Pied Wheatear, 1 female
- Northern Crombec, 1
- Red-fronted Crombec *Sylvietta whitii*, 1
- Purple Grenadier *Uraeginthus ianthinogaster*, 2
- Grey Wren-warbler *Calamonastes simplex*, 1
- African Grey Flycatcher *Bradornis microrhynchus*, 1
- Yellow-breasted Apalis *Apalis flavida*, 1
- Cut-throat Finch *Amadina fasciata*, 1 male

We resumed our journey southwards towards Negele, along the Negele-Arero road, famous among birders for being one of the best spots to find the Prince Ruspoli's Turaco, one of the most spectacular endemic species of Ethiopia. Until this stop (indicated on map 9, together with the route) we saw from the cars:



Map 9. Itinerary in afternoon of 7 December, from 'stop acacia savanna' to Negele, with the turaco stop roughly indicated

- House Martin, some
- Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, 1 ind. seen by Jaume, Alberto Rivera, Jesús and Maarten
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 3 seen by Jesús
- Rüppell's Vulture, 1
- Dark-capped Bulbul, 2
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, c. 25
- Hooded Vulture, 2
- Dusky Turtle-dove, several
- Fan-tailed Raven, 1
- African Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus*, 2 ind.

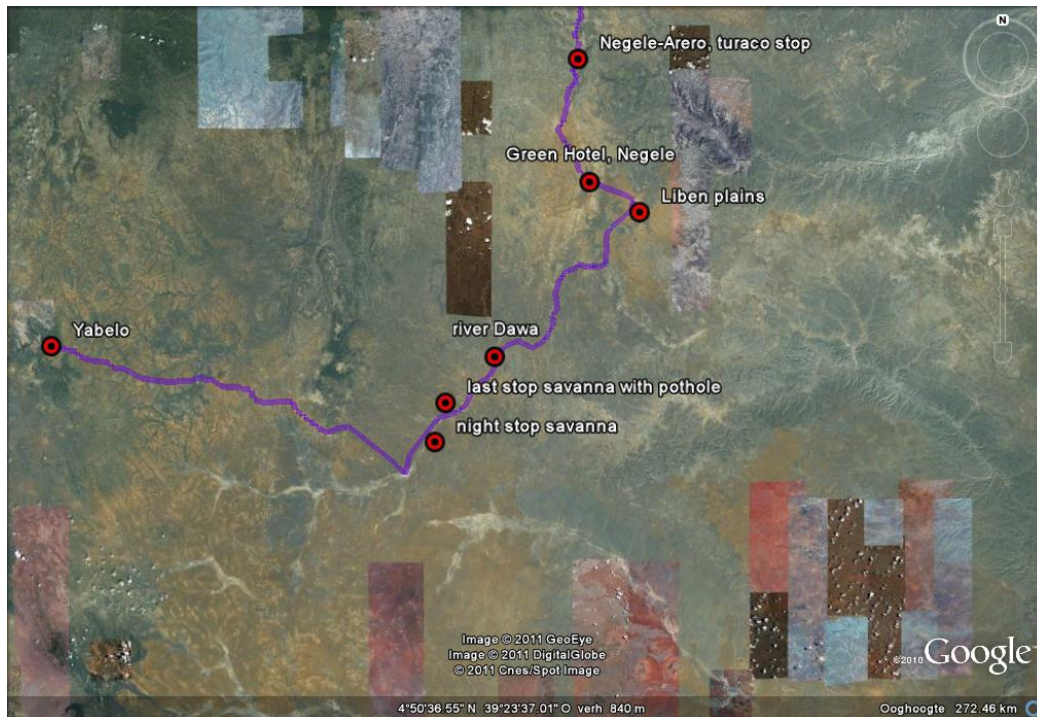
During the stop at the turaco site along the Arero – Negele road we got some help of local people in finding the turaco. We saw at this site:

- Fork-tailed Drongo, 3
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, several
- Red-eyed Dove, 1 calling
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Prince Ruspoli's Turaco *Tauraco ruspolii*, 3 ind.; the local people assisted in localising the first bird that suddenly appeared in the top of a dead tree, well visible but still rather far off; calls being played in order to lure it closer by Juan Carlos resulted in a second individual popping up in a much closer tree and responding enthusiastically to the calls... in the 'scopes, this individual showed all characteristics (crest, eye-lashes etc.) from very close range; then, we also heard the same calls from a 3rd individual that did show itself
- Violet-backed Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*, 3 males, 2 females, together in the same tree with the first Prince Ruspoli's Turaco that appeared into sight
- Dark-capped Bulbul, 1
- Barn Swallow, present
- Lesser Striped Swallow, seen by Jesús
- Speckled Mousebird, present

After sundown, and already close to the village of Negele, we spotted 2 individuals of the Guenther's Dikdik *Madoqua guentheri*.

The arrival at the Negele Green Hotel was a great disappointment for all of us. The name of the place evidently suggested that this would be a good place to rest, have a shower and a good night's sleep. The adjective 'green', however, only seemed to refer to the few and scant trees in the precinct and maybe to the fact that the ecological footprint of any aspect of the business here was likely to be minimal. There was no running water anywhere, not even in the toilets, and we were initially supposed to sleep two persons per one-and-a-half person's bed in just about the shabbiest kind of cabins imaginable. Fortunately, dinner was not bad at all, but we did decide to leave the next day as early as possible, at the break of day, and have our breakfast on the way.

Day 7: 8 December 2011



Map 10. Itinerary of 8 December, showing the birding stops: Liben plains, river Dawa and two savanna stops, one of which just at dusk for nightjars

Fully packed, and after a rather uncomfortable night's sleep, seriously disturbed by a barking dog until quite early in the morning and the imam calling us to pray from the moment of the dog's final silence onwards, we were all packed and sacked, waiting for the drivers and the cars to leave even before 6:00 in the morning. Just on the hotel's precinct we saw and heard:

- Red-eyed Dove, some calling
- Common Chiffchaff, 1 singing
- Hooded Vulture, 13 ind., also rising early today
- African Thrush *Turdus pelios*, at least 1 ind. calling
- Speckled Pigeon, several

We left the village in the direction of the ornithologically famous Liben plains. On the way there we saw:

- Speckled Pigeon, 10
- Red-eyed Dove, several
- Tawny Eagle, 3 ind. perched in trees, closely together, probably in proximity to nest
- Laughing Dove, 4
- Superb Starling, 36

- African Pygmy Falcon *Polihierax semitorquatus*, at least 1 ind. on telephone post, seen by two cars, that, unfortunately, failed to advise the others...
- Pied Wheatear, 3
- Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*, 9 ind., quite close to the road, offering excellent views
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, 16
- Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudatus*, at least 1 ind. on a wire
- Common Kestrel, 1
- White-crowned Starling *Spreo albicapillus*, c. 40
- Grey-rumped Swallow *Pseudhirundo griseopyga*, 4 on a wire

We then arrived at the Liben plains, where we were supposed to find the legendary Sidamo Lark, one of the most threatened bird species in Africa, which apparently only occurs on this particular place in the world, consisting of just a few square kilometres of flat, short grassland, a terrain, in fact, rather similar to where in Spain the elusive Dupont's Lark can be found. Equally similar to this species, it seems that the Sidamo Lark is not easy to flush, but is rather inclined to escape running. After a short while of general birding, we therefore decided to systematically 'comb' the area, with each one of us at a few metres distance from one another walking in a broad front in the same direction.

Birds seen were:

- Plain-backed Pipit, 2
- White Wagtail, 1
- Barn Swallow, 6
- Eurasian Hoopoe, 1
- Isabelline Wheatear, 4
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, 2
- Pied Wheatear, 2
- Dwarf Raven *Corvus edithae*, 11
- Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, 1
- Ethiopian Swallow *Hirundo aethiopica*, c. 10
- Abdim's Stork, a flock of at least 124 ind.
- White Stork, at least 1 ind. among the Abdim's Storks
- Somali Short-toed Lark *Calandrella somalica*, probably close to a 100 ind. actively singing, being flushed all over the place and occasionally offering close views; 1 singing ind. incorporating the typical call of a Green Sandpiper in its song!

Then, suddenly, Jesús, discovered a suspicious-looking lark just at the feet of Javier Bitrián. Carefully, we all came together and found a slightly larger-looking lark with a remarkably upright stance, running in front of our feet and clearly showing the characteristic scalloping pattern on its upperwings of the famous Sidamo Lark *Heteromirafr sidamoensis*. Particularly our own 'larkologist' Alberto Bueno was now living one of his finest moments of the entire trip. The photographers Jaume and Jesús went up in front of our 'line', taking several pictures of high-standard quality. We all became rather elated and when a little local boy came up, carrying some fresh goat-milk and offering us some of it, at least some of us were able to muster up the courage to try it. In fact, it tasted excellently, having even a slight saviour of the aromatic herbs of the area, and absolutely not too fat to be drunk by westerners.



A very satisfied group, just after having successfully localised the elusive Sidamo Lark *Heteromirafransidamoensis* at Liben plains (Juan Carlos Alberro)

Meanwhile, our drivers had disappeared with the cars, in order to get fuel for the cars and breakfast for us, but, contrary to our expectations, they were still far out of sight. For lack of other things to do, we just kept on birding:

- Pectoral-patch Cisticola, 3 singing and displaying
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Egyptian Goose, 1
- Lilac-breasted Roller, 2
- Crowned Lapwing *Vanellus coronatus*, a flock of 19 birds
- Speckled Pigeon, 6
- White-crowned Starling, 25
- Hooded Vulture, 1
- Superb Starling, several
- Reichenow's Seedeater, 7
- Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, 1
- Shelley's Rufous Sparrow *Passer shelleyi*, 2
- Common Kestrel, 2

Only a few 100 metres south of Liben plains, when the cars had finally turned up, we saw:

- Temminck's Courser *Cursorius temminckii*, a flock of 6 birds
- White-crowned Starling, 35
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, 6
- Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, 1
- Speke's Weaver *Ploceus spekei*, 1 male, among the flock of White-crowned Starlings

Then, along the road further south (see map 10), stopping briefly on occasion, we saw (and/or heard):

- Superb Starling, scattered flocks just about everywhere
- White-bellied Bustard *Eupodotis senegalensis*, 1 ind. heard calling, a characteristic shrill and strident repeated whistle, identified by Jesús, based on his South African experience
- African Wattled Lapwing *Vanellus senegallus*, 2 ind. in a small stream
- Lilac-breasted Roller, 7
- Common Kestrel, 2
- Red-and-yellow Barbet *Trachyphonus erythrocephalus*, 2 ind. offering fabulous views on one of those typical rufous termite mounds, that characterise this acacia savanna landscape

- White-headed Buffalo-weaver *Dinemellia dinemelli*, 2
- Von der Decken's Hornbill *Tockus deckeni*, 8 ind.
- Rufous-crowned Roller *Coracias naevius*, 4
- African Orange-bellied Parrot, 1
- Abyssinian Roller, 1
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Laughing Dove, 1
- Fork-tailed Drongo, 1
- Northern White-crowned Shrike, 5
- Eastern Chanting Goshawk *Melierax poliopterus*, 1
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 1
- Bare-faced Go-away Bird *Corythaixoides personatus*, 1 ind. seen by Alberto Bueno
- ground squirrel spec., 2
- White-backed Vulture, 1
- Egyptian Vulture, 2 adult
- Golden-breasted Starling *Lamprotornis regius*, 2
- African Hawk-eagle *Aquila spilogaster*, 1 imm. at very close range above the car, photographed by Jaume and Jesús
- Olive Baboon, 3
- Hooded Vulture, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 2
- Red-billed Hornbill *Tockus erythrorhynchus*, 1

We had a lunch and birding stop along the river Dawa, cutting through acacia savanna, where we saw:

- Magpie Starling *Speculipastor bicolour*, 1 ind. seen by Juan Carlos
- Rufous Chatterer *Turdoides rubiginosa*, 1 ind. seen by Juan Carlos
- Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*, 1 adult perched on a dead tree in the river bank, later soaring off towards the southeast
- Dodson's Bulbul *Pychonotus dodsoni*, 2 ind., clearly distinguishable thanks to yellow vent, white marking on cheek and gradual transition between dark breast and white belly
- Yellow-billed Kite, several, one ind. with clearly white head
- Spur-winged Lapwing, 2 in river bed
- Green Sandpiper, 1 in river bed
- Golden-breasted Starling, 1
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, 1 calling
- Tree Pipit, 1 calling
- Emerald-spotted Wood-dove *Turtur chalcospilos*, 1 ind. seen by Javier Train
- Marabou Stork, 1 soaring high up in the sky
- Von der Decken's Hornbill, 1
- Levaillant's Cuckoo *Clamator levaillantii*, 1
- Yellow-spotted Petronia *Petronia pyrgita*, 1 adult with 1 recent fledgling, seen by Maarten
- White-backed Vulture, 2

After a lunch, we payed a short fleeting visit to the village nearby in order to score the African White-winged Dove *Streptopelia reichenowi*, the only opportunity to see this species on our route. To the absolute amazement of the entire village, four 4-wheel drive cars drove in, we sprinted out excitedly to see and photograph the birds and then we quickly jumped back into the cars again and immediately turned around to resume our journey:

- African White-winged Dove, at least 2 ind.

Continuing further south, and including one hurried stop (not included in map 10), due to a fleeting glimpse of a flushed-up Black-bellied Bustard, we saw:

- Von der Decken's Hornbill, 3
- Yellow-billed Kite, 13
- ground squirrel spec. 2
- Eastern Chanting Goshawk, 7
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 5

- Wahlberg's Eagle, 1
- Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*, 1 imm., 1 adult female
- Red-eyed Dove, several
- Superb Starling, abundant
- Hooded Vulture, 3
- White-headed Buffalo-weaver, 1
- Guenther's Dikdik, 42, frequently in pairs or small groups
- Rufous-crowned Roller, 3
- Blue-headed Coucal, 1 calling
- Vulturine Guineafowl *Acryllium vulturinum*, at least 23 ind. in several family flocks, excellent though brief views
- Emerald-spotted Wood-dove spec., 1 ind. crossing the road
- Pied Wheatear, 2
- Common Kestrel, 1
- Fork-tailed Drongo, 3
- African Orange-bellied Parrot, 1
- African Grey Flycatcher, 2
- Pale Flycatcher *Bradornis pallidus*, 1 ind. seen by Alberto Bueno
- Laughing Dove, several
- Pin-tailed Whydah, 1 male, 2 females
- Eastern Paradise Whydah *Vidua paradisaea*, 1 male in spectacular flight display, photographed beautifully by Jaime
- Vitelline Masked Weaver *Ploceus vitellinus*, some ind. seen by Jesús
- Spotted Palm Thrush *Cichladusa guttata*, 1 ind. seen and photographed by Jesús
- Marico Sunbird *Cinnyris mariquensis*, some ind.
- Buff-bellied Warbler, several seen by Juan Carlos
- Black-bellied Bustard *Lissotis melanogaster*, 1 male seen fleetingly from the car by Jesús and Maarten, causing all of us to stop, but not being found again...
- Lilac-breasted Roller, 1
- Red-billed Hornbill, 1
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 4
- Lesser Masked Weaver *Ploceus intermedius*, some along the road

Back in the cars and speeding further SW we saw:

- Lappet-faced Vulture, 1
- White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, 1 imm.
- White-backed Vulture, 3

All five vultures together on a carcass next to the road. Spectacular views of White-headed Vulture!

- Pin-tailed Whydah, 1 male

We then, with the sun already going down, we made our last daylight birding stop next to a well-filled freshwater pond in the midst of the acacia savanna zone. Frantically birding, we saw:

- White-browed Bush-chat *Cercotrichas leucophrys*, 4
- Red-fronted Barbet, 3 ind., 1 of which immature
- Black-capped Social Weaver *Pseudonigrita cabanisi*, a colony in a tree next to the pond
- Purple Grenadier, 1 male, 1 female
- Superb Starling, several flocks
- Eurasian Hoopoe, 1
- D'Arnaud's Barbet *Trachyphonus darnaudii*, 2
- Grey Wren-warbler, 2
- Banded Parisoma *Parisoma boehmi*, at least 1 ind. seen and photographed by Jesús
- Marico Sunbird, some ind.
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Yellow-spotted Petronia, 1 adult and 1 fledgling
- Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes orientalis*, 1 male
- Brubru, 3
- African Grey Flycatcher, 1

- Von der Decken's Hornbill, 2
- Little Bee-eater, 2
- Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas*, 1 ind.
- Tree Pipit, 1 calling
- Abyssinian Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus minor*, at least 1 ind.
- Northern Grey Tit, 1 seen and heard
- Yellow-breasted Apalis, 1 seen by Jesús
- Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis*, 1 seen by Javier Train, Alberto Bueno and Maarten

Then, we hurriedly continued, with Juan Carlos slightly crossed with us, because we were overdue in time for the nightjar stop. Until that final stop, we saw from the cars:

- Guenther's Dikdik, 32
- Vulturine Guineafowl, 47 in several flocks
- Golden-breasted Starling, 2
- Superb Starling, abundant
- Bright's Gazelle *Nanger notatus*, c. 10 ind. in the dusk; savanna is getting less densely overgrown by acacias by now...

Then, at the last stop (see map 10), and after having seen 1 or 2 nightjars in the headlights, we made the last stop, way after sundown, and Juan Carlos played some nightjar songs. In response, we heard at least:

- Dusky Nightjar *Caprimulgus fraenatus*, at least 1 ind. rattling, sound rather similar to European Nightjar but at only one tone, and at the start with occasional hiccups; the birds seen were probably this species (too big for Donaldson-Smith's Nightjar)
- Donaldson-Smith's Nightjar *Caprimulgus donaldsoni*, 1 responding to the sounds played, but unfortunately rather far off

Then, pitch-dark now, we continued our way to the hotel in Yabelo, still occasionally seeing some nightjars, which were presumably Dusky.

Finally at the hotel, we gratefully had a shower (far better hotel here!) and a good, healthy meal.

Day 8: 9 December 2011

Early in the morning, near the hotel in Yabelo, we saw:

- Hooded Vulture, 25
- Speke's Weaver, 1 colony in a tree in front of the hotel, birds active at the nests
- Fan-tailed Raven, 27
- Pied Crow, 3
- Speckled Pigeon, 13
- Swainson's Sparrow, 4 nesting under the roof of the hotel
- African Orange-bellied Parrot, 1
- Red-eyed Dove, 2
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 1
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, 3
- Superb Starling, some
- Grey-capped Social Weaver *Pseudonigrita arnaudi*, c. 25 foraging at very close range on the ground, with several young birds among them
- White-crowned Starling, 5
- Red-billed Hornbill, 1
- Augur Buzzard, 1



Map 11. Itinerary and birding stops on 9 December, in the vicinity of Yabelo; in the morning visiting the rather open savanna area on the road to Negele (after two shorter stops at more densely overgrown savanna) and in the afternoon a visit to the Yabelo Wildlife Sanctuary on the edge of acacia forest

After breakfast we set out towards the open savanna along the road to Negele. Until the first stop, still in rather dense acacia stands, we saw:

- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 1
- African Orange-bellied Parrot, 2

Then, at the first stop, we dispersed as usual, and among all of us found the following birds:

- Superb Starling, abundant
- Golden-breasted Starling, some
- Slate-coloured Boubou, 1
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 1
- Red-billed Hornbill, 2
- Dodson's Bulbul, 5
- Northern White-crowned Shrike, 1
- Hunter's Sunbird *Chalcomitra hunteri*, at least 1 ind., seen and photographed by Jesús
- Jacobin Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*, 2 ind. calling, seen and heard by Juan Carlos and others
- Northern Brownbul *Phyllastrephus strepitans*, 1 ind. seen by Dani and Javier Bitrián
- cf. Pringle's Puffback *Dryoscopus pringlii*, 1 ind. seen and photographed by Jesús
- Levaillant's Cuckoo, 1
- Fork-tailed Drongo, 1
- Pygmy Batis *Batis perkeo*, 1
- Marico Sunbird, 1
- Nubian Woodpecker, 1 female
- Somali Crombec *Sylvietta isabellina*, 1
- Northern Grey Tit, 1
- Brubru, 1
- African Bare-eyed Thrush *Turdus tephronotus*, 1
- Somali Bunting *Emberiza poliopleura*, 1 ind. seen by Alberto Rivera and some others

Slightly further south, we found a dead jackal along the road, probably a Black-backed Jackal *Canis mesomelas* and we saw, until the next stop:

- Bateleur, 1 adult female
- Tawny Eagle, 3
- White-crowned Starling, 1
- Guenther's Dikdik, 1
- Lappet-faced Vulture, 1
- White-backed Vulture, 1

Then, dispersing over the acacia zone at the 2nd stop (see map 11), we found:

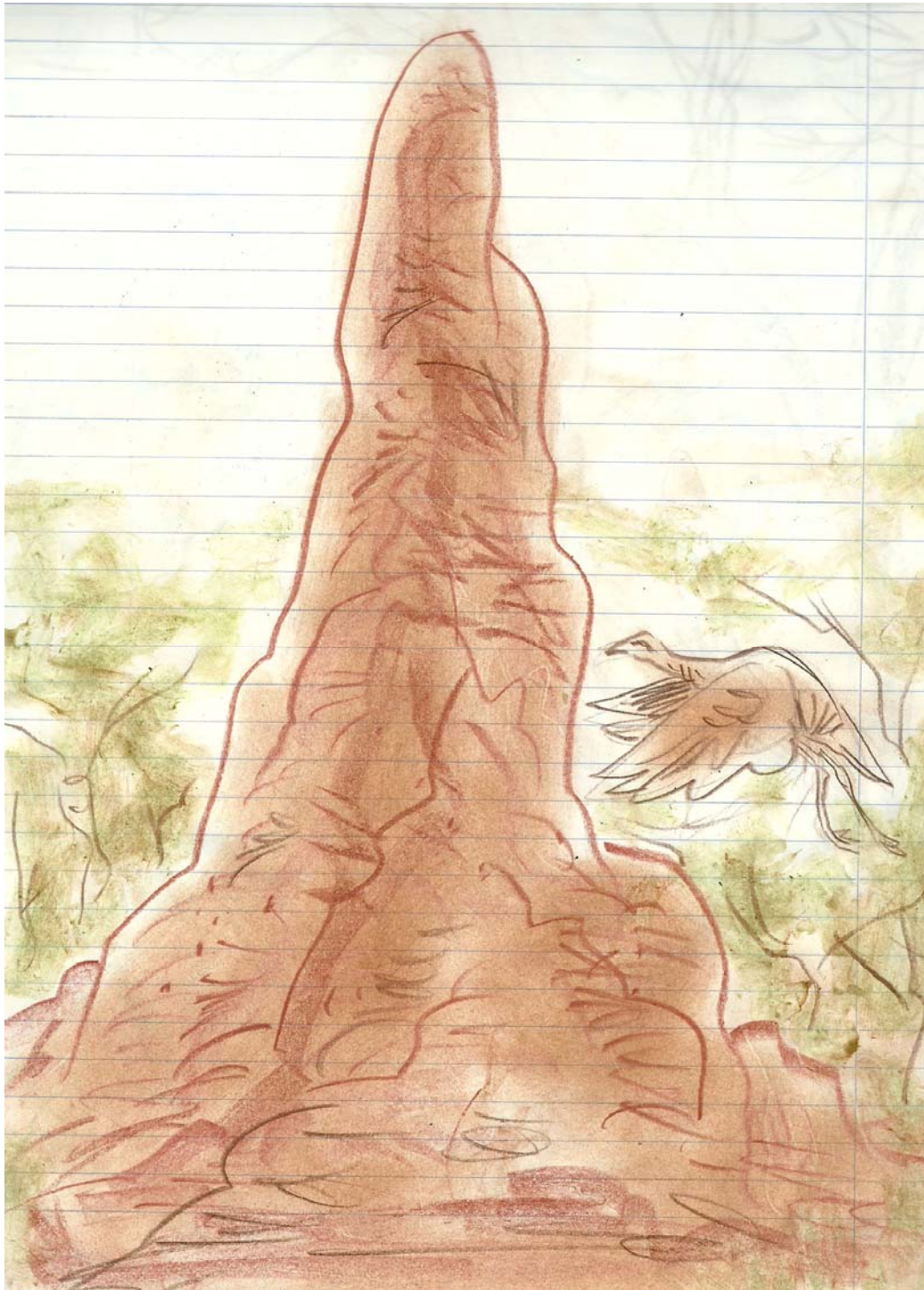
- Northern Grosbeak-canary *Serinus donaldsoni*, 1 seen and photographed by Jesús
- Scaly Chatterer *Turdoides aylmeri*, 1 seen and photographed by Jesús
- Tiny Cisticola *Cisticola nanus*, 1 seen and photographed by Jesús
- Red-naped Bush-shrike *Laniarius ruficeps*, seen by Javier Train and Jesús
- Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, 1
- Grey Wren-warbler, 2
- White-headed Vulture, 1 adult
- White-backed Vulture, 2
- Cardinal Woodpecker, 1 female
- Dodson's Bulbul, 2
- Somali Bunting, 1
- Red-headed Weaver, 1 female
- White-browed Bush-chat, 7 frequently calling
- Bateleur, 2 imm.
- Pale Flycatcher, 1
- Straw-tailed Whydah *Vidua fischeri*, 1 male seen by Fernando, Javier Train and Maarten
- Marico Sunbird, 1 male, 1 female
- Hooded Vulture, 10
- Dwarf Raven, 2
- Eastern Chanting Goshawk, 1
- White-bellied Bustard, 1 seen and drawn by Carlos
- White-browed Coucal *Centropus superciliosus*, 1 ind. seen by Alberto Bueno and some others
- Rosy-patched Bush-shrike *Telophorus cruentus*, 1 seen by some
- Yellow-necked Spurfowl *Pternistis leucoscepus*, 1 ind. seen by Javier Train and heard calling by all



Scaly Chatterer *Turdoides aylmeri* (Jesús Lavedán)



Tiny Cisticola *Cisticola nanus* in rather open acacia savanna south of Yabelo (Jesús Lavedán)



White-bellied Bustard *Eupodotis sengalensis* at a termite mound as seen and drawn by Carlos Enriquez

Then, we continued until the open savanna area along the Negele road. On the way there we saw:

- Bristle-crowned Starling *Onychognathus salvadorii*, 1 ind. crossing the road, red-winged starling with extremely long tail, seen by Maarten
- Common Kestrel, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 3
- White-crowned Starling, 2
- Superb Starling, several

- Bateleur, 1 adult female
- ground squirrel spec., 1
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Lappet-faced Vulture, 6
- White-backed Vulture, 5

Then, we arrived at the open savanna area, where we birded with rather more time and much less hurriedly. The bird list here summed up to:

- Stresemann's Bush-crow *Zavattariornis stresemanni*, a pair at nest, a bit further on, 4 more ind.
- Laughing Dove, present
- Superb Starling, abundant
- Shelley's Rufous Sparrow, 2
- Chestnut Sparrow, large flocks
- White-bellied Canary *Serinus dorsostriatus*, 1 male
- African Grey Flycatcher, 1
- Grey-capped Social Weaver, abundant
- Black-capped Social Weaver, abundant (but less so than previous species)
- Eurasian Hoopoe, 12 ind., at least 5 ind. calling
- Isabelline Wheatear, 3
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, present
- Blue-naped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus*, one small flock
- Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, at least 32
- Brubru, 4
- Southern Gerenuk *Litocranius walleri*, at least 1 grazing the acacias at quite close range
- Northern White-crowned Shrike, 4
- Somali Ostrich *Struthio molybdophanes*, 1 male and 1 female, discovered by Juan Carlos at extreme large distance, in 'the house of the Lord' as the Spanish expression says, quietly grazing and browsing
- Reichenow's Seedeater, several
- Red-billed Hornbill, 1
- African Grey Flycatcher, 1
- Fork-tailed Drongo, 1
- Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, 2
- Rufous-crowned Roller, 2
- Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, 1 male offering excellent views
- White-headed Buffalo-weaver, 7
- White-tailed Swallow *Hirundo megaensis*, 2 offering several brief and tantalising views, but actually quite unconfusable; a very intriguing endemic species only occurring in this particular corner of the world...
- Northern Wheatear, 9
- Black-chested Snake-eagle *Circaetus pectoralis*, 1 adult
- Common Fiscal, 2
- Bright's Gazelle, 10 ind. N of the road, c. 60 S of the road
- Somali Fiscal *Lanius somalicus*, 2 adults with nest, 3 more ind.
- Lilac-breasted Roller, 2
- Pied Wheatear, 2
- Fan-tailed Raven, 3
- Common Kestrel, 1
- Speckled Pigeon, 28
- Shelley's Starling, 1



Jesús Lavedán scanning the savanna from a termite mound (José María Canudo)

Then, after an improvised lunch in the shadow of one of the bigger acacias, we returned by car to Yabelo. On the way back there we saw:

- White-crowned Starling, 1
- African Harrier-hawk, 1
- Eastern Chanting Goshawk, 1
- Barn Swallow, some
- Yellow-billed Kite, 1
- Speckled Pigeon, several
- Red-eyed Dove, several
- Ring-necked Dove, several
- Superb Starling, scattered flocks
- Dwarf Raven, 6
- White-headed Vulture, 2 adult
- Tawny Eagle, 3 on the road
- White-headed Buffalo-weaver, 5
- Common Kestrel, 1
- Eastern Grey Plantain-eater *Crinifer zonurus*, 1

In the village of Yabelo, before setting out for the afternoon trip to the Yabelo Wildlife Sanctuary, we saw:

- Pied Crow, c. 15
- Yellow-billed Kite, 6
- Hooded Vulture, 25
- Lanner Falcon, 1
- White-crowned Starling, 2
- Dark-capped Bulbul, 2
- Swainson's Sparrow, several
- Speke's Weaver, colony
- Reichenow's Seedeater, 1
- Greater Blue-eared Starling

While driving to the Yabelo Wildlife Sanctuary, in westerly direction, with half of the cars (some of us preferred to visit the town centre), we saw:

- White-crowned Starling, 2
- Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, 1
- Northern White-crowned Shrike, 2
- Von der Decken's Hornbill, 1
- Egyptian Goose, 2

In the Yabelo Wildlife Sanctuary, while walking quietly around near a farm situated in the acacia savannas, we observed:

- Blue-naped Mousebird, 2
- White-crowned Starling, 13
- Dark-capped Bulbul, some
- Stresemann's Bush-crow, 2
- Superb Starling, some flocks
- Speckled Pigeon, 4
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, several
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 3
- Shelley's Starling, 3
- Rattling Cisticola *Cisticola chiniana*, 5
- Fork-tailed Drongo, 1
- White-headed Buffalo-weaver, 2
- Nubian Woodpecker, 1 male
- Brubru, 1
- Lesser Striped Swallow, c. 25
- Red-billed Hornbill, 1
- African Orange-bellied Parrot, 4
- Hadada Ibis, 1
- Eastern Chanting Goshawk, 1
- Slender-billed Starling, 3
- Mouse-coloured Penduline-tit *Anthoscopus musculus*, 1 ind. seen by Alberto Bueno
- Heuglin's Courser *Rhinoptilus cinctus*, 2 ind. after sundown in the headlights of the car, excellent views!
- Guenther's Dikdik, 1

Day 9: 10 December 2011

Before leaving Yabelo back north again, in the direction of Hawassa, on the east bank of lake Awassa in the Rift valley (see map 12), we saw near the hotel:

- Hooded Vulture, 8
- Yellow-billed Kite, 10
- Red-eyed Dove, several calling
- Speke's Weaver, birds in colony
- Speckled Pigeon, present
- Swainson's Sparrow, present
- Superb Starling, present
- Fan-tailed Raven, 6
- Pied Crow, some
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 1



Map 12. Itinerary on 10 December 2011, from Yabelo to Hawassa with birding stops indicated

Between Yabelo and the 1st stop, at a rather untouched stretch of *Podocarpus* forest, we saw from the cars:

- Greater Blue-eared Starling, several
- Superb Starling, regular flocks
- Augur Buzzard, 1
- Tawny Eagle, 3
- Speckled Pigeon, 20
- White-crowned Starling, 3
- Stresemann's Bush-crow, 3
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 1
- Black-headed Gull, 2
- ground squirrel spec., 1
- Golden-breasted Starling, 12
- Yellow-billed Kite, 11
- Hooded Vulture, 10 on dead mongoose spec., 2
- Mosque Swallow, 2
- African Wattled Lapwing, 2

At the first stop, in the afore-mentioned *Podocarpus* forest, we saw:

- White-rumped Babbler, c. 10 ind., subspecies *omoensis*
- Abyssinian Black-headed Oriole, 4 singing
- Olive Baboon, 1 family
- Guereza Colobus, 1 making a spectacular jump downwards
- Montane White-eye, c. 15
- Booted Eagle, 1 light phase
- Variable Sunbird, 1 male, yellow-bellied subspecies

We then continued until the 2nd stop and from the cars we saw:

- Hooded Vulture, 13
- Yellow-billed Kite, 29
- cf. Steppe Eagle, 3
- Variable Sunbird, 4 singing
- White-headed Vulture, 3
- African Harrier-hawk, 1

- Steppe Buzzard, 1
- Thick-billed Raven, 1

The 2nd birding stop took place at a high-elevation moorland (c. 2700 metres above sea level), with some moist pastureland, a few shallow still waters with reeds, rushes and sedges. The birds we saw here included:

- Hadada Ibis, 5
- Wattled Ibis, 15
- Egyptian Goose, 4
- Yellow-bellied Waxbill, 2
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, 4
- African Stonechat, 2 males, 2 females
- Streaky Seedeater, 1
- Mountain Thrush, 2
- Groundscraper Thrush, 1
- Hooded Vulture, 1
- Red-collared Widowbird *Euplectes ardens*, at least 6 males among the rushes
- Ethiopian Cisticola *Cisticola lugubris*, 2 ind.

We continued our journey northwards, until we made a brief stop for coffee in a village. From the cars we saw:

- Great Sparrowhawk, 1 imm. female
- Yellow-billed Kite, 31
- Cape Rook, 3
- Hooded Vulture, 4
- Steppe Eagle, 1

From the terrace of the restaurant in the village of the 3rd stop (see map 12), and in the patio where we went for a sanitary stop, we saw:

- Red-billed Firefinch, 1 male, 1 female
- Common Waxbill, 1
- Montane White-eye, 10
- Rüppell's Robin-chat, 1
- Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 5

Between this village and Hawassa, and including an unindicated stop in a rather big town where the guide Elias had to do some transactions in a bank, we saw:

- Yellow-billed Kite, 57 (during the stop), 59 between the stop and Hawassa
- Variable Sunbird, 5 singing
- Hooded Vulture, 29 (during the stop), 46 between the stop and Hawassa
- Thick-billed Raven, 5
- Marabou Stork, 4
- Long-crested Eagle, 1 passing overhead
- Horus Swift *Apus horus*, c. 10 close to the church of the town
- Barn Swallow, several
- House Martin, 1
- Common Bulbul, 1
- White-backed Vulture, 1
- Speckled Pigeon, 1
- Dwarf Raven, 1
- Pied Crow, 2
- White-browed Sparrow-weaver, 2

In the town of Hawassa we had lunch on the terrace of an Italian restaurant. While at it, we still managed to see:

- Grey-backed Fiscal, 3
- Marabou Stork, 48
- Yellow-billed Kite, 16
- Hooded Vulture, 17

- Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, 7
- Beautiful Sunbird, 2
- Scarlet-chested Sunbird, 1 male
- African Fish Eagle, 1 calling
- Black-winged Lovebird, 1
- Speckled Mousebird, some

Then, at last, we arrived at the hotel of Hawassa, with cabins in a luxurious garden on the bank of lake Awassa. This is a rather shallow but immensely big freshwater lake, with marshy fringes overgrown with rushes and reeds and some very interesting wetland fringes along a well-frequented dyke where in the afternoon a lot of the local people are taking their afternoon leisure walk. After having settled in the cabins, we walked the dyke and birded alongside lake Awassa:

- Egyptian Goose, some
- Common Chiffchaff, at least 1 in the hotel garden
- Marabou Stork, abundant just about everywhere
- Swainson's Sparrow, present
- Red-eyed Dove, present
- Woodland Kingfisher, 1
- Hooded Vulture, abundant
- Tacazze Sunbird, several
- Chestnut Sparrow, at least 1 in the hotel garden
- Common Redstart, 1 male in the hotel garden
- Ethiopian Boubou, 1 male in the hotel garden
- African Fish Eagle, c. 15
- Blue-breasted Bee-eater, 1
- Bronze Manakin, 1 male, 3 females
- Blue-headed Coucal, 2
- African Jacana, c. 75
- African Pygmy Goose, 2 males, 2 females
- Long-tailed Cormorant, c. 15
- Pied Kingfisher, c. 45
- Great Cormorant, 2
- Hamerkop, abundant
- Plain Martin, some flocks feeding over the water
- Common Greenshank, 4
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, abundant
- Red-knobbed Coot, 20
- Ruff, some scattered ind.
- Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, 4
- Little Egret, 2
- Grey-headed Gull, c. 10
- Black-headed Gull, c. 5
- Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*, c. 5
- Wood Sandpiper, c. 15
- Common Sandpiper, 3
- Speckled Pigeon, present
- Dusky Turtle-dove, some
- Malachite Kingfisher, at least 17
- Northern Red Bishop *Euplectes franciscanus*, c. 20 in female-like plumage, among the inundated rushes
- Squacco Heron, c. 2-4
- Black-headed Wagtail, several calling
- Glossy Ibis, c. 5
- Great White Pelican, at least 1 far off
- Common Moorhen, c. 25
- Spur-winged Lapwing, c. 15
- Hottentot Teal, c. 20
- Sacred Ibis, 4
- Grey-backed Fiscal, 1 adult

- Western Marsh Harrier, 1 male
- Common Snipe, 2
- Black Crane, 3
- Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*, c. 10
- Lesser Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus gracilirostris*, 1 adult feeding a recently fledged young
- Spur-winged Goose, 1 juvenile
- White-backed Duck *Thalassornis leuconotus*, 1
- Common Waxbill, c. 25
- Speckled Mousebird, 1
- Lesser Black-backed Gull, 2 adult, nominate race *fuscus*
- White-faced Whistling-duck, a flock of c. 15
- Pied Crow, 2
- Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, 1 ind. flying by

Day 10: 11 December 2011

At night I was suddenly awakened by a sound of Cani's cell phone. Logically, I thought his alarm went off and I rose to go to the toilet and control the hour. Since it was only 2:00 in the morning, of course I went back to bed. I accidentally woke up Cani because I made a lot more noise than necessary closing the toilet door. Although half asleep, he was conscious that he had actually received an sms message that Barcelona had beaten its eternal rival by 1 to 3, although in the Madrid Bernabeu stadion. Very satisfied, because he is a Barcelona fan, he turned around and immediately went back to sleep.

When at 5:30 the real alarm had gone off and we were actually rising in order to start our last day of Ethiopian birding, Cani asked me whether he had been dreaming or, in fact, had actually received this gratifying message. I could confirm that he had, so he remained very satisfied.

During the pre-breakfast walk through the hotel garden and along the dyke of lake Awassa, we identified the following birds:

- Red-eyed Dove, several
- African Fish Eagle, c. 15
- Marabou Stork, abundant
- Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, several
- Guereza Colobus, some
- Egyptian Goose, c. 10
- Sacred Ibis, c. 20
- African Jacana, c. 50
- African Pygmy Goose, 6
- Red-billed Firefinch, c. 20
- African Thrush, 2
- Blue-headed Coucal, 1
- Little Grebe, 4
- Spur-winged Lapwing, c. 10
- Common Greenshank, 5
- Little Egret, c. 5
- Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, c. 5
- Bronze Manakin, c. 10
- Baglaffeht Weaver, c. 5
- Pied Crow, some
- Pied Kingfisher, c. 25
- White-rumped Babbler, 2
- Plain Martin, flock of c. 50 ind.
- Common Bulbul, 2
- Black Crane, c. 10
- African Mourning Dove, 5
- Cattle Egret, c. 5
- Great Cormorant, c. 5

- Malachite Kingfisher, c. 15
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, c. 15
- Long-tailed Cormorant, c. 10
- Wood Sandpiper, c. 25
- Common Sandpiper, c. 5
- African Citril, 2
- Squacco Heron, 4
- White Wagtail, 2
- Ruff, c. 15
- Glossy Ibis, 1
- Common Moorhen, c. 20
- Hottentot Teal, c. 20
- Black-headed Wagtail, c. 5 calling
- Barn Swallow, several
- Speckled Pigeon, several
- Northern Red Bishop, c. 25 in female-like plumage among the inundated rushes
- Sedge Warbler, 1 ind. among the rushes
- Grey-backed Fiscal, 3
- African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*, 1 ind. seen very well
- Grey-headed Gull, 4
- Spur-winged Goose, 1
- Swainson's Sparrow, present
- Great White Pelican, 2
- Black-necked Grebe, 5
- Grey-backed Camaroptera, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 10
- Beautiful Sunbird, 1
- Whiskered Tern, c. 5
- Hamerkop, abundant, with nest in garden
- Red-fronted Tinkerbird, 1 ind. in the garden seen by Maarten
- Common Chiffchaff, 1 singing
- Thick-billed Raven 2
- Hooded Vulture, 1
- White-browed Sparrow-weaver, some

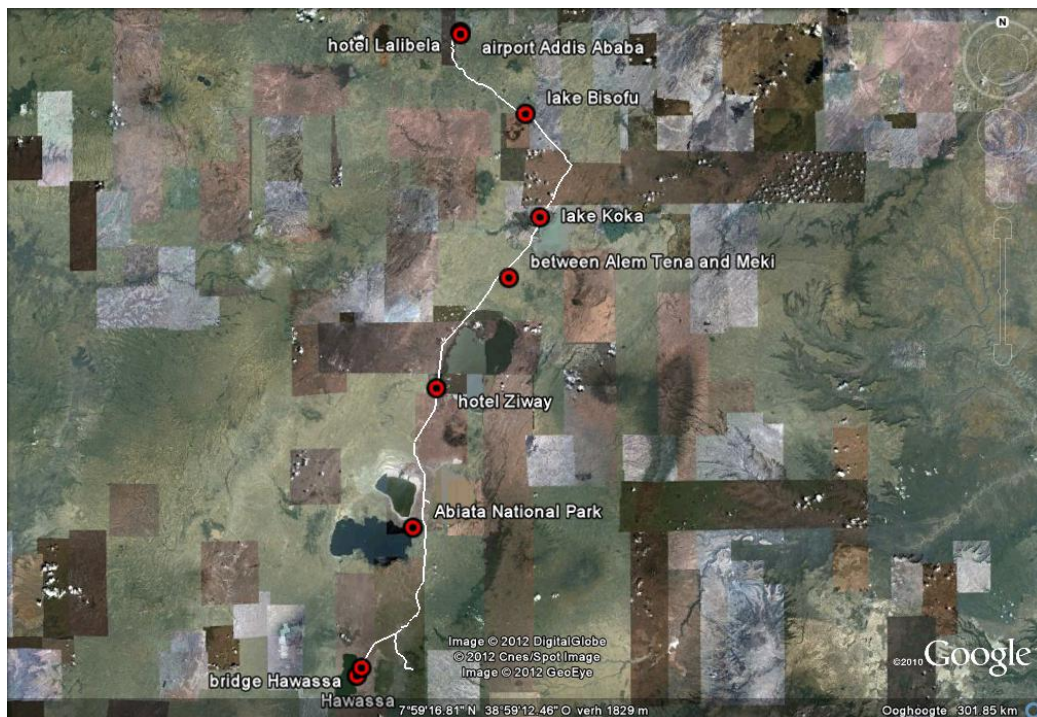
After breakfast, all of us went to the fish market, where several of the more spectacular marshland birds offered spectacularly close views. It seems evident that Ethiopian culture never included much bird-hunting, because generally the birds are extremely confident. It often happened that one would have wanted some of the Marabou Storks to be slightly further away, either for better pictures or for a better views on the other species... At the fish market we saw:

- Marabou Stork, walking everywhere, having nests on many trees and scavenging around
- Yellow-billed Kite, abundant
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, some
- Malachite Kingfisher, several
- Grey-headed Gull, some
- Black-headed Gull, some
- White-winged Tern, some
- Great White Pelican, c. 10, some ind. very close
- African Fish Eagle, c. 15
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, some
- Spur-winged Goose, some ind.
- Common Sandpiper, 1
- Red-knobbed Coot, 20
- Great Cormorant, 5
- Long-tailed Cormorant, 10
- Egyptian Goose, 10
- Hooded Vulture, 5
- Lesser Honeyguide, 1

- Swainson's Sparrow, present
- Speckled Mousebird, 1

Then, the two cars with the hard-core birders went to a bridge over a river that feeds lake Awassa (see map 13), a famous site among birders, offering good views over the wetland zone where the river meets the lake. From this viewpoint we saw:

- Yellow-billed Kite, 45
- Marabou Stork, c. 20
- Hippopotamus, 5 ind., one of which a young mounted on one of its parents; surprisingly these huge animals were not discovered by us at first... then, suddenly, Dani said: "Those rocks over there are no rocks... they are Hippopotamuses!" and, indeed, he was right... Spectacular views of completely confident animals...
- Hamerkop, c. 10
- Spur-winged Goose, 80
- Egyptian Goose, 20
- Spur-winged Lapwing, 10
- Hooded Vulture, 10
- Common Greenshank, 6
- Little Egret, 2
- Grey-backed Fiscal, 3
- Red-eyed Dove
- Squacco Heron, 3
- African Jacana, c. 25
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, present
- Long-tailed Cormorant, several
- African Fish Eagle, 2
- Red-knobbed Coot, 15
- Great Cormorant, several
- Great White Pelican, some ind. quite far off
- Black-winged Stilt, 1
- Olive Baboon, 1



Map 13. Itinerary on 11 December, going from Hawassa, via Abiata National Park, back to Addis Ababa

Continuing further north, in the direction of Addis Ababa, and until the entrance of the lake Abiata National Park (cf. map 13), we saw from the cars:

- Pied Crow, present
- Northern Carmine Bee-eater, 1
- Abyssinian Roller, 8
- Abyssinian Ground-hornbill, 2 crossing the road in flight
- Thick-billed Raven, 3
- Yellow-billed Kite, 19
- Hooded Vulture, 23
- Grey-backed Fiscal, 1
- Speckled Pigeon, several
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, several
- Wattled Ibis, 1
- Lilac-breasted Roller, 2
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Black-billed Wood-hoopoe, 1
- Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, 1 dead on the road

Lake Abiata National Park consists of a quite open savanna landscape with only scattered stands of acacias and other bushes, but also of two lakes, lake Shala in the south holding freshwater and very deep, only interesting for birds nesting on its islands, and lake Abiata in the north, a shallow and rather brackish lake, with receding water levels, often very interesting for wading birds like flamingoes and for resident as well as Palearctic waders. The shores of lake Abiata are extremely barren and do not hold any significant vegetation for several 100s of metres around.



One of the disadvantages of the extremely open landscape near lake Abiata was that the author of this trip report, suddenly confronted with an extremely urgent need to respond to nature, did not find refuge in any kind of covering vegetation to hide...

In the park's precincts we saw:

- some ostriches from a re-introduced population consisting of both species
- Red-faced Crombec, 1
- Speckled Pigeon, several
- Fork-tailed Drongo, 3
- Willow Warbler, 1
- Laughing Dove, some
- Ring-necked Dove, some
- Striped Kingfisher, 1
- Rüppell's Starling, 5 adult, 2 immatures, 4 unaged birds

- White-backed Vulture, 1
- Barn Swallow, some
- Common Warthog, 2
- Bright's Gazelle, 1
- Hemprich's Hornbill, 2
- Swainson's Sparrow, 10
- Red-billed Hornbill, 1
- Buff-bellied Warbler, some ind. calling
- Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, 1 ind. seen by some
- Eurasian Hoopoe, 2
- Northern Wheatear, 2
- Red-billed Oxpecker, 1
- Crowned Lapwing, 3
- White-browed Sparrow-weaver, 17
- Pied Wheatear, 5
- Cape Rook, 3
- Little Bee-eater, 4
- Superb Starling, scattered flocks
- Northern White-crowned Shrike, 10
- Yellow-billed Kite, several
- White-headed Buffalo-weaver, 6
- Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*, c. 20 on the lake Abiata shore
- Common Sandpiper, 2
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, present
- Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*, c. 40
- Ruff, c. 200
- Little Stint, c. 150
- Wood Sandpiper, c. 25
- Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, 1
- Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, 1
- Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, 2
- Marsh Sandpiper, 2
- Northern Shoveler, c. 800, a big flock!
- Sand Martin, 2 flying overhead (while embarrassingly forced to defecate in the middle of the extremely open shore area...)
- Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, 2
- Black-winged Stilt, 1
- White-bellied Go-away Bird, 1
- Bearded Woodpecker *Dendropicos namaquus*, 1 ind. offering close views
- Hooded Vulture, 5
- White-backed Vulture, 15
- Marabou Stork, 2
- Pale Flycatcher, 1
- Long-crested Eagle, 1 perched in a tree at very close range
- Namaqua Dove, 1

After leaving the Abiata National Park, we continued our way north until the village of Ziway, where we had an open-air lunch in the same hotel we slept in on our way south. Here we finally met another birder, apparently British, with whom we exchanged some scanty experiences.

On our way to Ziway we saw:

- Yellow-billed Kite, 3
- Hooded Vulture, 1
- Abyssinian Roller, 2
- Namaqua Dove, 2
- Marabou Stork, 2

In Ziway itself, while having a rather copious lunch, we identified:

- Marabou Stork, 20

- White Stork, 2 flying overhead
- Yellow-billed Kite, 10
- White-browed Sparrow-weaver, several
- Barn Swallow, some
- Hooded Vulture, 10
- Tawny Eagle, 3
- African Fish Eagle, 1 adult
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, 1

Then we continued further north and between Ziway and a reportedly interesting agricultural area between Alem Tena and Meki (a rather flat and open area with several crop cultures and good possibilities for larks, insectivorous raptors and possibly even sandgrouse) we saw:

- Marabou Stork, 4
- Greater Blue-eared Starling, some
- African Fish Eagle, 1 adult
- Pied Crow, 1
- Cape Rook, 1
- Speckled Pigeon, 4
- Western Marsh Harrier, 1 male, 1 female
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Common Kestrel, 1
- Hamerkop, 1
- Yellow-billed Kite, 2
- Barn Swallow, several
- Hooded Vulture, 3

In the fields between Alem Tena and Meki we made a quick but intensive walk, which produced:

- Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, 2 ind. seen at very large distance by Juan Carlos
- Montagu's Harrier, 1 male
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, some
- Pied Wheatear, several
- Northern Wheatear, several
- Chestnut Sparrow, several
- Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark *Eremopterix leucotis* c. 10 ind., of which at least 4 singing males
- Grassland Pipit, 10
- Speckled Pigeon, 5
- Common Kestrel, 2
- Common Crane, 4

Then, we continued our way north to the southern shore of lake Koka (see map 13). On the way there we see:

- Cattle Egret, 6
- Speckled Pigeon, 11
- Eastern Chanting Goshawk, 1
- Dusky Turtle-dove, several
- Red-eyed Dove, several

Along lake Koka, we now made two stops: the first one on the southern fringe, the second near the bridge where we also stopped on our way south. Among the two stops we succeeded in identifying:

- Hamerkop, 55
- Marabou Stork, c. 50
- Sacred Ibis, 50
- Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, some, 1 female of which at less than half a metre from my eye...
- Black Crowned Crane *Balearica pavonina*, 2 ind. on the shore of the lake at very large distance, aptly discovered by our guide Elias

- Great White Pelican, 2
- Whiskered Tern, 2
- White-winged Tern, 2
- Ruff, 6
- Barn Swallow, several
- African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp*, 1 fine male
- Blue-headed/Yellow Wagtail, some calling
- Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*, 3
- Egyptian Goose, c. 30
- Tawny Eagle, 1
- Pallid Harrier, 1 male, 1 female
- Intermediate Egret, 4
- Cattle Egret, 2
- Eastern Chanting Goshawk, 1
- Black-headed Gull, 1
- Spur-winged Goose, 5
- African Fish Eagle, 2 adult, 1 imm. and 3 dead individuals, close together, possibly electrocuted
- Great Egret, 3
- Wood Sandpiper, c. 5
- Black-winged Stilt, 2
- African Darter, 1
- Spur-winged Lapwing, 4
- Wire-tailed Swallow, 6
- Glossy Ibis, 4
- Sand Martin, c. 10
- Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, 1
- Goliath Heron, 1
- Grey Heron, 2
- Pied Crow, 1

Between lake Koka and the village of Bisofu, where we had to recollect the papers that Fernando would need to show tonight in order to retrieve his lost luggage (which we assumed must have arrived at Addis Ababa airport by now), we saw:

- Speckled Pigeon, 19
- Yellow-billed Kite, 26
- Pied Crow, 5

While Elias disappeared in Bisofu to find the papers, Juan Carlos, Cani and Maarten birded lake Bisofu for about 10 minutes. This is a large freshwater lake, apparently rather deep, with remarkably steep shores, densely covered with high, green trees. We saw on the lake:

- Little Grebe, a large concentration of at least 400 ind.
- Black-necked Grebe, at least 50 ind. among the Little Grebes
- Southern Pochard *Netta erythrophthalma*, 1 male, 1 female
- Pink-backed Pelican, 1

In a tree quite close to the terrace from where we were overlooking the lake, Cani discovered:

- Black-billed Barbet *Lybius guifsobalito*, 1 adult, offering good views

Between Bisofu and the hotel Lalibela in Addis Ababa, we made our last ornithological observations of this fascinating journey, while the sun gradually went down:

- Yellow-billed Kite, 5
- Pied Crow, 3
- Speckled Pigeon, 20
- Dusky Turtle-dove, several
- Pallid Harrier, 1 adult male
- Egyptian Goose, 1
- Black-winged Stilt, 1
- Hamerkop, 2

We arrived at hotel Lalibela, Addis Ababa, at about 18:30, at dusk. Some rooms were hired in

order to allow each one of us a well-needed shower, before having our last common dinner and going to the airport. We went there rather early to make sure we had enough time for Fernando to reclaim his luggage and for me to reclaim my telescope. Both of us were successful and Fernando just facturated his luggage, unopened, back to Madrid. I had to pay, ironically, 7 Birrs for the safe storage of my 'scope and the customs official insisted on accompanying me all through luggage check-in (me thus receiving a king of 'vip' treatment) and through immigration, just to make sure I really was not trying to smuggle in the telescope after all... It all just seemed so silly, knowing that at least five other telescopes had been entered into the country by my fellow birders...

At 2:10 local time, our plane left Addis Ababa for Istanbul, where we all arrived (just) in time for our respective transit flights to Madrid and Amsterdam.

A very successful birding trip thus came to an end...

