

# Ethiopia's Endemic Mammals

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Depart London for Addis Ababa
<b>Day 2/3</b>	Awash National Park
<b>Day 4/5</b>	Lake Lanagano
<b>Day 6/7</b>	Bale Mountains
<b>Day 8</b>	Lake Awassa
<b>Day 9</b>	Addis Ababa
<b>Day 10</b>	Debre Libanos Gorge & The Solulta Plains
<b>Day 11</b>	Fly London

### Departs

October & February/March

### Focus

Mammals

### Grading

Grade A

### Dates and Prices

See Website (tour code ETH02) or brochure

### Highlights

- Discover Ethiopia's unique mammals: Mountain Nyala, Menelik's Bushbuck, Gelada Baboon, etc
- Watch Ethiopian Wolves hunting Giant Molerats
- Visit the spectacular Bale Mountains – an endemics hotspot
- Enjoy safaris in Awash National Park
- Superb birdlife & flora including many endemics
- Journey along the Great Rift Valley



Images from top: Gelada Baboon, Ethiopian Wolf & Black-and-white Colobus Monkeys (by Dani Free)



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## Introduction

Ethiopia is a fascinating, beautiful and welcoming country. The climate is warm and comfortable all year round and the country supports a large number of endemic birds and mammals. There are not the huge numbers of large predators and game to be found here as in other parts of Africa, but the species that do



Awash National Park

live here are cleverly adapted to their unique surroundings and very special indeed. The highlights of this tour will undoubtedly be the wonderful long-haired Gelada Baboons with their red 'hearts', the beautifully coloured Ethiopian Wolf and the strange but endearing Giant Mole Rat! All of these and several other mammals found no-where else but Ethiopia, will be viewed on this tour, along with birds, general natural history and a little culture.

Ethiopia's scenery is stunning, with masses of lakes surrounded by mountainous peaks and dusty valleys dotted with acacia trees. The people of this country are friendly and welcoming hosts, with proud traditions. As the only African country to have escaped European colonialism, Ethiopia retains a rich culture and boasts a fascinating history, providing an interesting backdrop to a week of viewing many of the countries endemic mammal species along with some enjoyable birdwatching.



Gelada Baboon (Tim Melling)



Swayne's Hartbeeste (Tim Melling)

## Itinerary

*Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.*

### Day 1

### In flight

We depart from London Heathrow this evening on an Ethiopian Airlines overnight flight to Addis Ababa.

### Day 2

### Awash National Park

Arriving in Addis early this morning, we will pause for breakfast before spending most of the day driving slowly to the Awash National Park, birding as we go. As we cross flat, dry farmlands there is little of scenic interest, but the roadside birds are in plenty: Augur Buzzards, Long-crested Eagles, Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, Abyssinian and Rufous-crowned Rollers to name but a few. We will stop for lunch in the small farming town of Nazareth, and later at Lake Basaaka to look for Nile Crocodiles and waterbirds. We should reach Awash in late afternoon, in time to enjoy the beautiful sunset over the park and to see the first of this area's interesting wildlife. For our 2-night in Awash we stay at a basic but comfortable lodge inside the National Park.

### Day 3

### Awash National Park



Beisa Oryx (Terry Goble)

We will spend today exploring Awash National Park. The beauty of Awash is that visitors can explore it on foot, for it is free from typical east African park restrictions, and most dangerous mammals. Spanning 350 square miles, Awash became the first of Ethiopia's national parks in 1966. It is situated on the Awash River, with its spectacular gorges, and is made up of acacia and scrub-bound plains, with hills and the volcano, Mount Fantalle, in its northern quarter. Ethiopia's troubles over the last few decades, including population displacement and wars, have taken their toll on the country's wildlife and large mammal populations have declined markedly. Even so, during our time in Awash we still hope to find Beisa Oryx, Lesser Kudu, Defassa Waterbuck, Soemmering's Gazelle, Warthog, Salts Dik-dik and Olive Baboons. Predators are rare though and very unlikely to be seen.

The birdlife is exceptional, however, and includes Buff-crested, White-bellied, Kori, and even Arabian Bustards, Lichtenstein's and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Rosy-patched and other shrikes, plus many species of hornbills, weavers, woodpeckers, vultures, doves, pigeons, guineafowl, glossy starlings, parrots, bee-eaters, barbets, mousebirds and finches, to name but a few!

During our stay at Awash we will also visit a nearby Hyena cave at the foot of Mount Feantelle, a dormant volcano located in the northern area of the park. Arriving in the late afternoon, we take up position approximately 20 yards from the entrance and enjoy the surrounding birdlife, and perhaps the antics of the local Olive Baboons as we await the Hyenas emergence in silence. Though well habituated to living alongside mankind and of little threat, the experience of sitting in close proximity to such a powerful predator is sure to get the adrenaline running. Incredibly, over 50 Hyenas have been recorded emerging from the cave in a single evening and as dusk approaches, with luck we will be able to observe some of these unfounded villains of the animal kingdom, emerging from their daytime slumber and setting off on their nightly rounds.

## Day 4

## Lake Langano

We will leave Awash early this morning in order to drive to the lakes of the Rift Valley and, in particular, to enjoy short stops at Lakes Koka and Zwai, where we have a chance of seeing Hippopotamus, as well as numerous waterbirds. Lake Koka offers a great variety of waders, herons, spoonbills and egrets, patrolled by overhead harriers and vultures, Ethiopian and Wire-tailed Swallows. At Lake Zwai, as well as the huge numbers of waterbirds including pelicans and storks, we shall be looking for the endearing Tree Hyrax which is generally uncommon in central Ethiopia. We will arrive at our lodge on the shores of Lake Langano in the afternoon, and can enjoy a bird walk in the grounds or nearby forests before the sun goes down.

## Day 5

## Lake Langano

An early morning walk around the grounds of Hara will yield a kaleidoscope of colourful birdlife, including a variety of sunbirds, woodpeckers, Silvery-cheeked Hornbills, White-browed Robin Chats, Double-toothed Barbets, African Firefinches and a host of other bird species. In the afternoon, we plan to visit the nearby Abiata-Shala Lakes National Park, taking a walk on the high ridge that separates Lakes Shala and Abiata. Although the park suffers from grazing and human settlement, the views over the two lakes are magnificent, and driving through the park we have a good chance of seeing Bright's Gazelles, and perhaps a Spotted Hyena or Golden Jackal.



Hippopotamus (Johan Swanepoel)



Bright's Gazelles

## Day 6

## Bale Mountains

Those that wish may choose to enjoy another early morning bird walk this morning. Then, after breakfast, we will then embark on the scenic drive to the Bale Mountains National Park. Climbing through forests, fields, little villages and banana groves, we reach open grassy uplands where Blue-winged Geese, Rouget's Rails and Abyssinian Longclaws introduce us to the long list of Ethiopian endemic birds to be found in the area. Approaching the park the scenery becomes increasingly spectacular. Magnificent forests cling to the sides



Mountain Nyala

of deep valleys and high peaks, rocky outcrops, pinnacles and ridges pierce horizons, and moorlands, grasslands and peaty pools sit in plains and hollows. Entering the park we hope to encounter the first of the region's mammals including the endemic Mountain Nyala (a magnificent antelope unique to these hills), Common Duiker, Bohor Reedbuck, Menelik's Bushbuck and Warthog, all of which may be seen along the forest margins. As well as the mammals in the juniper forest we will look for a few more of the endemic birds such as Abyssinian Long-eared Owl, White-backed

Black Tit, Abyssinian Catbird, Black-winged Lovebird, Golden-backed Woodpecker and Black-headed Siskin. We will spend our two nights in the park at the Wabe Shebelle Hotel in Goba, which is basic but functional, and the closest accommodation to the Sanetti Plateau.

The Bale Mountains, lying between 9,500 feet and 14,360 feet, contain the largest tract of high moorland in Africa. Virtually uninhabited, they are entirely unspoilt and were set aside as a national park in order to protect the Mountain Nyala which is found nowhere else in the world. Of volcanic origin like the more famous Simiens in the north, the Bale Mountains may not be as spectacular, but they do possess an exceptional beauty and charm which can be likened to that of the Scottish Highlands. They are green and spacious, decorated with rocky peaks and crags, numerous small lakes, extensive heathland, magnificent cloud forests and bogs! Within the park is Mount Batu, at 14,360 feet one of the highest mountains in Ethiopia. The flora is fascinating and so is the fauna.



Ethiopian Wolf (Dahi Free)



Giant Mole-rat

The beautiful Ethiopian Wolf roams the Sanetti Plateau in small groups and is regularly seen, whilst Klippspringers, the endemic Stark's Hare, Warthogs, Rock Hyrax, the peculiar endemic Giant Mole-rat and the verminous but characterful Grass Rats and Swamp Rats are to be added to those species already mentioned. Amongst an interesting collection of upland birds we are likely to see eleven of Ethiopia's 29 endemics: Blue-winged Goose, Rouget's Rail, Spot-breasted Plover, White-collared Pigeon, Black-winged Lovebird, Golden-backed Woodpecker,

Abyssinian Longclaw, Abyssinian Catbird, White-backed Tit, Black-headed Siskin and Thick-billed Raven!

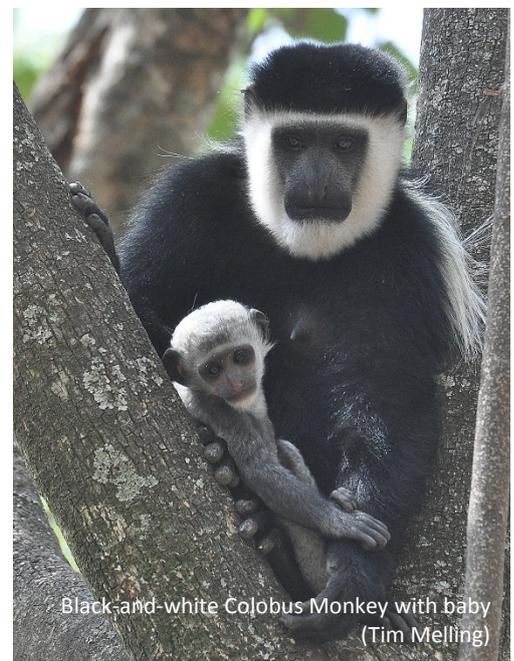
## Day 7

## Bale Mountains

Today we will make best use of our time in the Bale Mountains National Park by driving through it and focusing on the high altitude Sanetti Plateau, and later, if the weather (so notoriously fickle here) is favourable, on the edge of the magnificent Haremma Escarpment.

As we enter the park, and start to climb up through the fine Hagenia forest, we will look out for Chestnut-naped Francolins on the road, and Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawks and Mountain Buzzards in the air. Then, ascending onto an open moorland plateau where little lakes, extensive grasslands, and the weird spikes of primeval-looking Giant Lobelias and Red-hot Pokers provide a wonderful Afro-alpine habitat, we look for the characterful Grass and Swamp Rats and the numerous other small rodents in this area. These represent the main prey of the Ethiopian Wolf, and also attract many species of birds of prey that include wintering Spotted, Imperial and other Aquila eagles, as well as almost all of Ethiopia's vulture species. Wattled Crane and Montane Francolin are two resident specialities, as are the endemic Rouget's Rail, Spot-breasted Plover and Blue-winged Goose which may all be found here. Our main aim, however, will be a sighting (or sightings) of the endangered Ethiopian Wolf or bizarre Giant Mole-rat – two of Ethiopia's most special mammalian endemics.

After spending the morning on the Plateau (and if the weather permits), we will drive to the spectacular Haremma Escarpment where we will have our picnic lunch, alongside some remarkable views. If the weather is dry and the road conditions favourable, we will try and descend part of the escarpment to look at the fabulous forests it supports. This outstanding feature, on the southern side of the national park, presents a fascinating environment and, provided that the weather is clear, some quite amazing scenery. Lions, Hunting Dogs, Bush Duiker and Giant Forest Hogs have all been encountered in this wonderful forest, though our chances of seeing any of these rare mammals is somewhat remote! It will be more realistic to set our sights on such primates as the Eastern Black-and-white

Black-and-white Colobus Monkey with baby  
(Tim Melling)

Colobus and Blue Monkey (a rarity in Ethiopia) and such endemic birds as White-backed Black Tit, Abyssinian Catbird, Black-winged Lovebird, Golden-backed Woodpecker and Black-headed Siskin perhaps. Returning across the plateau and back down to the town of Goba, we will spend our second night there.

## Day 8

## Lake Awassa

Sadly we must leave the park behind this morning, and retrace our steps back to the Rift Valley. This time we shall stay at Lake Awassa, a beautiful freshwater lake, set amongst hills and a luxuriant vegetation, quite unlike the alkaline lakes to the north. Amongst the lilies and great reedbeds that encompass the lake we may be lucky enough to see Hippopotamus, an elusive animal in Ethiopia! We will also encounter numerous waterbirds, including Black, Goliath and other herons, the ugly Marabou Stork, Hamerkops, Hadada Ibis, a variety of egrets, dainty African Pygmy Geese, Fulvous and White-faced Whistling Ducks, Knob-billed Duck, Black Crakes, African Jacanas, and both Pied and Malachite Kingfishers. Nearby, in the mature acacia woodland beside the lake, we will look for Eastern Black-and-white Colobus Monkeys, Vervet Monkeys and Menelik's Bushbuck. We spend tonight at a comfortable hotel close to the lake.



## Day 9

## Addis Ababa

Making an early start, we will drive 60 kilometres to the west of Lake Awassa to Sankelle Sanctuary. This is one of the few reserves protecting the endangered Swayne's Hartebeest, and we have a good chance of seeing them here. Other grassland mammals we may encounter include the shy Oribi. Heading back to Shashemene and making a stop for lunch, we shall complete our drive northwards up the Rift Valley stopping en-route for leg stretching and birding, we will arrive in Addis Ababa late this afternoon.

## Day 10

## Debre Libanos Gorge & the Solulta Plains (Overnight Addis)

We will have an early start this morning for a day's excursion to the Debre Libanos Gorge. Leaving Addis, we drive up into the eucalyptus-clad Entoto Hills and cross a pass at 8,537 feet to reach the Solulta Plains, a region of grassy uplands and small pools with a fine complement of birdlife. Wattled and Sacred Ibises, Blue-winged and Egyptian Geese, Yellow-billed Ducks, Pallid Harriers, Black-shouldered Kites, Short-crested and Red-capped Larks, Abyssinian Longclaws, Isabelline and Red-breasted Wheatears, Hill Chats, Groundscraper Thrushes, Pied Crows and Cape Rooks are all to be found in the area. Driving on to the Gorge - carved deeply by a tributary of the Blue Nile - we will first explore the forested escarpment above the monastery of Debre Libanos, stopping to look at this impressive building, and will look for the endemic Ruppell's Chat. We will then walk along the lip of the gorge (a good spot for a picnic with a spectacular view!) where Lammergeiers, Ruppell's Griffons, Lanner Falcons, Fan-tailed Ravens, Black Kites, and the endemic White-billed Starlings soar.



Wattled Ibis (Tim Melling)



Gelada Baboon (Tim Melling)

Our main goal here is to look for the splendid Gelada Baboon, found in no other part of the world, often seen here in large troops. These magnificent animals will be a highlight of the tour for many people and we will spend some time watching the social interactions amongst the group. The adult males are especially impressive with their long flowing manes of hair streaked with blond highlights and their red 'bleeding heart'. The troops may cover a range of about 3-7 km each day along the borders of the cliffs where they forage along the edge of the gorge feeding on grasses, seeds and fruits.

At the end of a full and exciting day out, we will return to the capital where we will have day rooms to freshen up and re-pack, ahead of a farewell dinner and transfer to the airport late this evening to check in for our flight home.

## Day 11

We depart from Addis Ababa in the early hours of this morning, arriving into London Heathrow at around 0630 hours local time.

## Extensions

This week in Ethiopia is short and action-packed! There are many other interesting places to visit in Ethiopia should you have time, and we are always happy to help you extend your stay in country. Two possibilities are as follows:

### **Lalibela's Rock-hewn Churches**

This town is famous for its 11 rock-hewn monolithic churches, built in the early 12th century on the order of the Saint and King Lalibela, apparently with the help of angels! These stand in two groups, on either side of the river called Jordan, and are still worshipped in today. Many are richly carved and painted. Their situation is also spectacular, nestling high in the hills, and when not marvelling at the architecture of the churches, you will be able to enjoy some birdwatching on pleasant walks in the area.

**Day 1** (final day of group tour prior to flight home): Evening meal before the rest of group transfer to the airport for international flight to London. Overnight Addis.

**Day 2:** Early transfer to the airport for the morning flight to Lalibela (sometimes via Bahir Dar). On arrival, transfer to the local guest house or restaurant for lunch. This afternoon, begin your tour of Lalibela with the two groups of churches. Overnight Lalibela.

**Day 3:** Morning visit to Asheton Mariam, lunch, afternoon visit to Yeremrehane Kirstos. Overnight Lalibela.

**Day 4:** Morning transfer to airport for flight back to Addis. Check into hotel (rooms booked on day use), afternoon at leisure. Evening meal and transfer to the airport in time for your late departure back to the UK.

**Day 5:** Flight back in the UK (arriving ~ 0630 hours)

**Price:** Varies, but usually approx. £895 per person (based on min. 2 participants, full board and guiding).

### **Relaxing birding at Hara Langano**

Hara Langano offers relaxed birding within its grounds and along the lake shore. It's a great place to unwind at the end of the trip and you can explore the area easily without a guide (though lodge guides can be hired locally for approximately 20 US\$ per hour). Having spent the night of Day 5 at Hara, you will have some familiarity with it on your return.

**Day 1:** (final day of group tour prior to flight home): Evening meal before the rest of group transfer to the airport for international flight to London. Overnight Addis.

**Day 2:** Depart for Hara Langano after breakfast, arriving around lunchtime. Overnight Hara Langano.

**Day 3:** Birding at leisure around Hara. Overnight Hara Langano.

**Day 4:** Birding at leisure around Hara. Overnight Hara Langano.

**Day 5:** Morning at leisure, transfer back to Addis airport late this afternoon for check-in ahead of late departure to the UK.

**Day 6:** Flight back in the UK (arriving ~ 0600 hours)

**Price:** £550 per person (no single supplement, based on full board, unguided basis).

## Extra expenses

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday:

- Entry visa (currently US\$50) – this can be purchased online in advance or on arrival in Addis
- Alcoholic drinks, and other items of a personal nature such as laundry, souvenirs
- Discretionary tips

## Entry requirements

UK citizens require a visa to enter Ethiopia. You can apply and pay for an e-Visa in advance of travel by visiting the Ethiopian e-Visa website: <https://www.evisa.gov.et/#/home>. The process is quick and easy and saves a little time on arrival in Addis Ababa as you will join a separate e-Visa queue and won't then need to join a second queue to pay for your visa. You can, however, also obtain and pay for your visa on arrival at Addis Ababa Bole Airport at a cost of US\$50 (or the equivalent amount in British pounds, Euros, Ethiopian Birr and numerous other major currencies which are all accepted). Citizens of other countries should check requirements with their nearest Ethiopian embassy.

You should also take malaria prophylactics and some vaccinations are recommended. Details will be sent with pre-departure information, but you should visit your GP or local travel clinic to discuss your travel plans and ask their advice.

## Tour grading

Grade A. This is a straightforward birding tour, with an emphasis on seeing the endemic species that makes no great physical demands. However, in order to cover as wide a range of habitats as possible in a short time, this tour does include regular long drives, together with early starts and some late arrivals at hotels.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included in the price of this holiday. Please also note that the accommodation in Ethiopia does not compare with the well-appointed lodges and camps of other East African destinations, and most of the places we stay tend to be fairly basic. Rooms are usually very simple with en-suite bathrooms, but in some areas even the best available accommodation can often have problems with a lack of maintenance, so you should be prepared for a few problems like leaky plumbing, lack of hot water, lights not working, slow service in the restaurant, etc.



## Weather

The rainy season in Ethiopia usually runs from June until late September. Therefore, dry and sunny weather should be expected during our tours which take

place in the dry season (although there are often so-called 'short-rains' in March/April). The tours in October/November are likely to encounter a greener countryside than those in February/March time. Daytime temperatures range from 20°C to low 30s°C in the lowlands, but it is often much cooler in the mountains, so some warmer layers will be needed here. Cloud is likely in the afternoons and although the lowlands are usually dry at this season it can rain in the mountains and be cold at night.

## Your safety & security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ethiopia> regularly prior to travel.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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## The Mammals of Ethiopia

During this tour to Ethiopia you are likely to see most of the mammals in this list. In total you are likely to see around 30 species, though of course luck and endeavour will play their part! A full checklist of mammals and birds will be sent to you on booking with your pre-departure pack. Listed below are the more common species that you are likely to see:

1. Warthog (*Phacochoerus aethiopicus*)
2. Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*)
3. Common (Grey) Duiker (*Cephalophus grimmia*)
4. Oribi (*Ourebia ourebia*)
5. Klippspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*)
6. Menelik's Bushbuck (*Tragelaphus buxtoni meneliki*)
7. Mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*)
8. Bohor Reedbuck (*Redunca redunca*)
9. Swayne's Hartebeeste (*Alcelaphus buselaphus swaynei*)
10. Bright's Gazelle (*Gazella brighti*)
11. Giant Molerat (*Tachyoryctes macrocephalus*)
12. Grass Rat (*Arvicanthis blicki*)

13. Swamp Rat (*Otomys typus*)
14. Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax arboreus*)
15. Rock Hyrax (*Heterohyrax brucei*)
16. Gambian Sun Squirrel (*Heliosciurus gambianus*)
17. Abyssinian Hare (*Lepus habessinicus*)
18. Starck's Hare (*Lepus starcki*)
19. Ethiopian Wolf (*Canis simensis*)
20. Olive Baboon (*Papio cynocephalus*)
21. Hamadryas Baboon (*Papio hamadryas*)
22. Gelada Baboon (*Theropithecus gelada*)
23. Vervet Monkey (*Cercopithecus aethiops*)
24. Black-and-white Colobus (*Colobus guereza*)



Images courtesy of Tim Melling, Ania Papinska, Johan Swanepoel, Ingeborg van Leeuwen & Dani Free