

Ethiopia's Endemic Birds

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Addis Ababa
Day 2/4	Awash National Park
Day 5/6	Lake Langano
Day 7/9	Bale Mountains
Day 10/11	Lake Awassa and Wondo Genet
Day 12	Addis Ababa
Day 13	Debre Libanos Gorge & The Soluta Plains
Day 14	Fly London

Departs

February and November

Focus

Birds

Grading

Grade A

Dates and prices

See website (tour code ETH03) or brochure

Highlights

- Extensive bird list, including many of Ethiopia's endemics.
- Endemic mammals: Ethiopian Wolf, Mountain Nyala & Gelada Baboon.
- Superlative and dramatic landscapes.
- Debre Libanos Gorge & Bale Mountains
- Rift Valley Lakes & Wondo Genet Forest
- Fascinating Ethiopian culture



Images from top: Banded Barbet, White-cheeked Turaco & Spot-breasted Lapwing



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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. The bird life here is exceptional, with over 920 species recorded in the country, and a high proportion of both East African and Ethiopian endemics. Arriving into Addis Ababa, we are likely to find our first endemics before we even leave the city, as a post-breakfast walk in the hotel compound can produce Wattled Ibis, Black-winged Lovebird, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher and White-collared Pigeon. Over the following week, we will explore the semi-arid grassland and acacia scrub of Awash National Park, the high Sanetti Plateau and lush Hareenna escarpment in the Bale Mountains, the forest hills of Wondo Genet and both Lake Awassa and Lake Langano with their nearby forests. As well as birding highlights such as Abyssinian Longclaw, Abyssinian Catbird, White-backed Tit, Blue-winged Goose, Black-headed Siskin, White-cheeked Turaco and Thick-billed Raven, we will also enjoy some of Ethiopia's mammal highlights, including Gelada Baboons around Debre Libanos and the beautiful Ethiopian Wolf in the Bale Mountains. Ethiopia's scenery is stunning, with masses of lakes surrounded by mountainous peaks and dusty valleys dotted with acacia trees, and 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 this birdwatching and natural history tour.

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

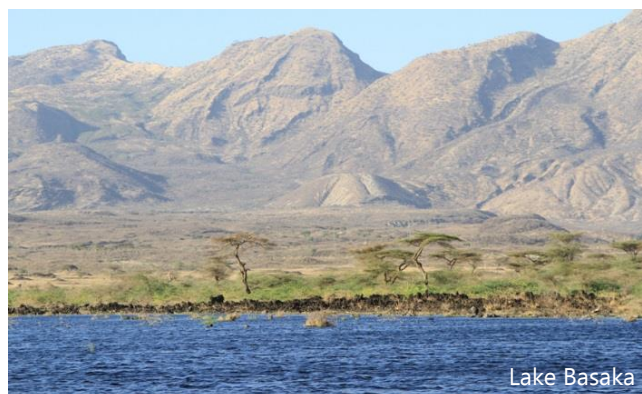
In flight

We leave from London Heathrow on an Ethiopian Airlines scheduled overnight flight to Addis Ababa.

Day 2

Awash National Park

Arriving in Addis at early this morning, we will spend most of the day driving slowly to the Awash National Park, birdwatching 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, 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 Basaka to look for waterbirds. We should reach Awash in the late afternoon, in time to enjoy the beautiful sunset over the park and to see the first of this area's interesting birdlife.



Lake Basaka

Day 3 – 4

We will the next two days 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; Lion, Leopard and Caracal are all present in the park, though very rarely seen. The birdlife, however, is exceptional 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!



Kori Bustard with Northern Carmine Bee-eater

Days 5 – 6

Lake Langano

We may have time early this morning for further birdwatching along the Awash River before the long drive to Lake Langano in the Rift Valley. En route we will make extended roadside stops at Lakes Koka and Zwai, where the arrays of waterbirds are quite exceptional. Lake Koka offers a great variety of waders, herons, spoonbills and egrets, patrolled by overhead harriers and vultures, and Ethiopian and Wire-tailed Swallows. At Lake Zwai, as well as the waterbirds, we will look for the endearing Tree Hyrax which is generally uncommon in central Ethiopia. Arriving at Lake Langano at dusk, we spend the next two nights in a comfortable, but basic, eco-lodge that hides amongst acacias near the shore.



Lake Langano

The acacia woodland around the lake offers wonderful birding opportunities, and we'll enjoy plenty of bird walks during our full day here. Dark Chanting Goshawks, African Fish Eagles, Hemprich's and Von der Decken's Hornbills, Cardinal Woodpeckers, White-bellied Go-away Birds, Red-billed and White-headed Buffalo Weavers, White-crowned Shrikes, Blue-naped Mousebirds, Little Bee-eaters, Mariqua Sunbirds and a variety of colourful finches are all to be found in this dry and thorny habitat.

Day 7

Goba, Bale Mountains

From Lake Langano we journey south through the Rift Valley before turning east and beginning the long climb up into the Bale Mountains, a drive that will take us through some spectacular scenery. To begin we cross extensive areas of wheat fields where Pallid Harriers can often be seen quartering the field margins. As we gain altitude the level agriculture gives way to more rugged highlands and we will begin to see flocks of White-collared Pigeons and Wattled Ibis along the roadside and Dusky Turtle Doves become common. We make a stop at a traditional roost site for Cape Eagle Owl, before continuing to the Bale Mountain National Park headquarters where we explore the rich juniper woodlands for roosting Abyssinian Owl and perhaps even African Wood Owl or Montane Nightjar. We will stay for the next two nights in Goba's only hotel – which is basic, but functional.



Senetti Plateau

Day 8 – 9

Goba, Bale Mountains

We have two days to make best use of our time in the Bale Mountains National Park by driving through it, and focusing first on the high altitude Sanetti Plateau, and later - if the weather, so notoriously fickle here, is favourable - on the magnificent Haremma Forest Escarpment.

The Bale Mountains, lying between 9,500 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 famous Simiens, the Bale Mountains may not be as spectacular, but they do possess an exceptional beauty and charm which can



Rouget's Rail

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. The beautiful Ethiopian Wolf roams the Park in small groups and is invariably seen, whilst Klipspringers, Abyssinian Hares, Warthogs, Rock Hyrax, the peculiar endemic Giant Mole-rat and the verminous but characterful Grass Rat may also be encountered. Amongst an interesting collection of upland birds we are likely to see at least eleven of Ethiopia's 24 endemics: Blue-winged Goose, Rouget's Rail, Spot-breasted Lapwing, White-collared Pigeon, Black-winged Lovebird, Golden-backed Woodpecker, Abyssinian Longclaw, Abyssinian Catbird, White-backed Tit, Black-headed Siskin and Thick-billed Raven!

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 wide range of raptors that hunt on the numerous Grass Rats and other small rodents in this area; wintering Spotted, Imperial and other Aquila eagles are amongst the birds of prey that we may see, and almost all of Ethiopia's vulture species regularly occur. Wattled Crane and Montane Francolin are two resident specialities, as are the endemic Rouget's Rail, Spot-breasted Lapwing and Blue-winged Goose which may all be found here. Around here we also have a good chance of spotting an Ethiopian Wolf or bizarre Giant Mole-rat – two of Ethiopia's most special endemic mammals.



After spending one day on the Plateau, the following will see us drive to the spectacular Haremma Escarpment, some remarkable views, and an afternoon in which to descend the Escarpment and explore the fabulous forests it supports (provided that the weather is dry). 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. Serval, Red 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 endemic birds as White-backed Black Tit, Abyssinian Catbird, Black-winged Lovebird, Golden-backed Woodpecker and Black-headed Siskin perhaps.

Day 10 – 11

Lake Awassa

Today we must retrace our steps back to Shashemene before journeying south to the forested hills of Wondo Genet where we will take lunch and spend the afternoon birding. Unfortunately, following years of uncontrolled cutting the forest is now much reduced, however, it still holds small populations of a variety of desirable species. Four endemics may be found including Black-headed Forest Oriole, Yellow-fronted Parrot, White-winged Cliff Chat and Golden-backed Woodpecker, whilst Half Collared Kingfisher, Spotted Creeper, African Hobby, Crowned Eagle and Olive Pigeons are amongst other specialities of the region.

The following full day will be used to catch-up with any missing species.



Day 12

Addis Ababa

Making an early start, we will explore the luxuriant shores of Lake Awassa. Amongst the lilies and great reedbeds that encompass the lake we should find Black, Goliath and other herons, the comical Marabou Stork, Hamerkops, Hadedra Ibis, a variety of egrets, dainty African Pygmy Geese, Fulvous and White-faced Whistling Ducks, Knob-billed Duck, Black Cranes, African Jacanas, Three-banded Plovers, Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns and both Pied and Malachite Kingfishers. Nearby, in the mature acacia woodland that conceals our lodge, a host of landbirds



African Pygmy Goose

complements this spectacle. Here we will search for Grey-headed and Woodland Kingfishers, Red-breasted Wrynecks, Green Wood-hoopoes, Sulphur-breasted Bush shrikes, White-browed Robin Chats, African Thrushes, Rufous Chatterers, Swamp Warblers, Red-faced Crombecs, Wattle-eyes, Puffbacks, Spotted Creepers, and many other colourful species. Birds are so very plentiful here that little energy is required in finding them, however, before long, it will be time to resume our journey northwards, up the Rift Valley and back towards Addis Ababa. En route we may stop at Lake Ziway once again to take another look at the waterbird spectacle, before moving on to Debre Zeit for lunch. Perched high on the rim of a crater, with magnificent views over Lake Hora, a forest-lined crater lake, this is a wonderful place to pass the middle of the day! Birdwatching around the Lake may also be rewarded with such species as Red-knobbed Coot, Hottentot Teal, Ferruginous and other diving ducks, as well as Banded Barbets, White-winged Cliff Chats, and other interesting passerines. We overnight at a comfortable hotel in Addis Ababa.

Day 13

Debre Libanos Gorge & the Soluta Plains

We will make 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 Soluta Plains, a



Griffon Vulture and Verreaux's Eagle

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, Erlanger's Lark, 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, where we 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. Lower down, we will be on the lookout for the splendid Gelada Baboon, another mammal endemic to Ethiopia, and the endemic White-winged Cliff Chat.

At the end of a full and excellent day's birding, we will return to the hotel where we have time for a meal and a chance to freshen up before travelling to the airport.

Day 14

London

We depart Addis Ababa on Ethiopian Airlines' scheduled early flight to London Heathrow, arriving there approximately 0630 (note that all flight timings subject to confirmation nearer departure).

Tour grading

Grade A. This is a straightforward birding tour, with an emphasis on seeing the endemic species that makes no great physical demands.

In December 2023, this itinerary has been revised to a 14-day itinerary, ensuring we have more time at each location to enjoy the wealth of birds on offer. However, one must be prepared for long drives in-between sites on this tour, sometimes up to 10 hours along what can only be described as less than glamorous road surfaces.

Weather

The rainy season in Ethiopia usually runs from June until late September, although can extend into late October. 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.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included in the price of this holiday. Please just 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.

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.

Regional departures

Connecting flights to and from Heathrow with British Airways (currently from Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Belfast, Dublin and Jersey) are available from around £185 return. There are also flights from Manchester to Addis Ababa (with a touchdown in Brussels) which sometimes coordinate well with our tours. Please contact the Naturetrek office for further information.

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, 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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