

Ethiopia's Endemic Birds & Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

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|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Day 1 | Outbound flights |
| Day 2 | Arrive Addis, Bishoftu Crater Lakes |
| Day 3 – 5 | Yabelo |
| Day 6 – 7 | Arba Minch |
| Day 8 – 9 | Lake Hawassa |
| Day 10 | Robe |
| Day 11 – 12 | Goba |
| Day 13 | Addis Ababa |
| Day 14 | Inbound flights |

Departs

February, March, November and December

Focus

Birds, mammals, and other wildlife

Grading

Grade B

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ETH12)

Highlights

- Discover Ethiopia's unique wildlife, with a wide variety of endemic mammals and birds
- Two days in the spectacular Bale Mountains – an endemics hotspot
- Superlative and dramatic landscapes
- Fascinating Ethiopian culture
- Led by a local naturalist who has guided over 100 Naturetrek tours in Ethiopia!



Introduction

Ethiopia offers an intoxicating blend of magnificent scenery, fascinating wildlife and an exceedingly rich culture and history. It was perhaps the earliest home of mankind, and later of Prester John – the legendary ruler of the east – and a dynasty of monarchs originating from the Queen of Sheba. It is a land of mixed religion, countless tribes and even more languages. Ethiopia is also one of the very few African countries to have escaped 19th-century colonialism and remains fiercely independent to this day. It is not only the country's long and rich history that makes Ethiopia such a special place, however, for its wildlife, too, is both exciting and unique. From the high moorlands of the Bale Mountains to the soda and freshwater lakes of the Great Rift Valley, a wonderfully diverse range of habitats is home to over 840 species of birds, around 50 of which are regional endemics or near-endemics, and 80 species of larger mammals, of which 10% are endemic.

Our tour begins with an overnight stay in the capital, Addis Ababa. After arriving, we will make a day trip to the beautiful crater lakes at Bishoftu, where steep volcanic calderas shelter an abundance of birdlife, from Ethiopian Bee-eater and Black Crowned Crane to Malachite Kingfisher, Abyssinian Woodpecker, Black-winged Lovebird and Ethiopian Thrush, alongside the ever-present Grivet Monkey.

The following morning, we fly south to Yabelo to explore the rich birding habitats of the region, including the bushlands around Mega and the forests of Meta Gafersa, home to endemics such as Stresemann's Bushcrow, White-tailed Swallow and the striking Ruspoli's Turaco. We continue to Arba Minch for a boat excursion on Lake Chamo, well known for its impressive Nile Crocodiles, Hippos and raptors, before travelling on to Lake Hawassa, one of the Rift Valley's most scenic freshwater lakes and a haven for both birds and mammals. From here, we visit Wondo Genet's forested slopes in search of further speciality species.

Turning east, we travel via Robe to the spectacular Bale Mountains National Park for a 2-night stay. As we ascend to the Sanetti Plateau, the scenery becomes increasingly dramatic, and we will look for the region's



Bale Mountains National Park

most iconic wildlife, including the endemic Mountain Nyala, Ethiopian Wolf, Spot-breasted Lapwing, Abyssinian Catbird, Rouget's Rail and the Giant Mole-rat. Descending into the Harennna Forest adds a completely different habitat and an exciting range of mammal and bird species.

The tour concludes with a flight back to Addis Ababa, where day rooms allow time to relax or explore the city before our international flights home. For those who wish to discover more of Ethiopia's cultural heritage, an optional extension visits Konso – now a UNESCO World Heritage Site – before continuing into the Omo Valley, one of Africa's most culturally rich and fascinating regions.

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 direct to Addis Ababa. For those travelling from the north of the UK, a direct flight is usually available from Manchester instead.

Day 2

Arrive Addis Ababa, Bishoftu Crater Lakes

Upon arrival in Addis Ababa this morning, we will head straight out of the city to avoid the usual traffic congestion. Just 90 minutes from the airport lies a stunning chain of crater lakes, nestled within steep volcanic calderas. At the lakes, we will enjoy breakfast at a lakeside restaurant, where we can begin spotting some of the region's special bird species. It's also the perfect opportunity to sample Ethiopia's renowned coffee, prepared in the traditional local style; it's truly delicious!

These lakes are home to an exciting variety of birdlife, including Abyssinian White-eye, Ethiopian Boubou, Black-winged Lovebird, Mocking Cliff-Chat, sunbirds, Ethiopian Bee-eater, Black Crowned Crane, and many more. The diversity of species we will see on our first day will be very rewarding.

After a most enjoyable day of birdwatching and exploration, we will return to Addis Ababa for an overnight stay, ready to begin our journey south the following morning.

Day 3

Yabelo

This morning we will take a flight to Yabelo, where we will spend the next three days exploring the best that southern Ethiopia has to offer. Starting near to the airport, there is some excellent scrub habitat where we can enjoy such species as Nubian and Cardinal Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Red-tailed Shrike, Red-bellied Parrot, Speckled and Blue-naped Mousebirds, Rosy-patched Bushshrike, weavers, starlings and much more.

Day 4

Yabelo (Mega)

Today we make an early start and travel approximately 100 kilometres south-east to the town of Mega. Our first birding stop is in a scenic gorge beyond the town, where we will search for speciality species such as Black-fronted Francolin.

The remainder of the day is spent exploring a series of productive birding areas both north-west of Mega and back towards Yabelo. This region regularly produces rich birding, and among the avian highlights are the sought-after endemics Stresemann's Bushcrow and White-tailed Swallow, together with species such as Black-capped Social Weaver, Crested Francolin, Crowned Lapwing, Cut-throat Finch, Pale Prinia, Purple Grenadier and Tawny Eagle. The area has a good selection of mammals such as Vervet Monkey, Olive Baboon, Common Warthog, Greater and Lesser Kudus and Guenther's Dik-dik.

Day 5

Yabelo (Meta Gafersa)

Today we again depart early, travelling approximately 80 kilometres east to the forested area around Meta Gafersa. Our main target here is the endemic Ruspoli's Turaco, which we will search for in productive woodland where this striking species is regularly encountered at close range.

After breakfast in the area, we continue our exploration in search of another key endemic, Salvadori's Seedeater, which can be more elusive but is regularly recorded here. The return journey towards Yabelo may produce additional highlights such as Pygmy Falcon and the regional speciality White-crowned Starling. We will spend the late afternoon and early evening birding in nearby scrubland, remaining until dusk in the hope of encounters with mammals such as Plains Zebra, which sometimes approach closely and remain unconcerned by our presence.



Ruspoli's Turaco

Day 6

Arba Minch

We depart Yabelo early this morning and begin the scenic journey north-west towards Arba Minch (approximately 200 kilometres). En route, we make a birding stop in Borana National Park, where we look for a variety of starling species, including Golden-breasted and Magpie, as well as the striking Vulturine Guineafowl and a range of scrubland species such as Parrot-billed Sparrow.

After breakfast at Kanta Lodge, we continue with a cultural visit to a local Segen people's village near Konso/Karat. From here, we travel down from the Konso uplands into the Rift Valley, passing through increasingly lush agricultural areas, with extensive banana plantations lining the route. We arrive at our comfortable accommodation in Arba Minch, the Haile Resort, where we will spend the next two nights.

Day 7

Arba Minch (Lake Chamo)

After breakfast we will head south to pick up the boat, which will take us out on an exciting excursion on Lake Chamo for hippo- and crocodile-watching – the Nile Crocodiles here can reach up to 7 metres in length! Birds we can expect to see include African Fish Eagle, African Marsh Harrier, Great White Pelican, Goliath Heron and Spur-winged Plover.

Back on land we can search for Wire-tailed Swallow, several kingfishers, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, African Woolly-necked Stork, and several interesting dragonflies including both Southern and Northern Banded Groundling, Tigertail and Eastern Blacktail. We will have lunch at the hotel before another excursion in the afternoon, which we will keep intentionally flexible to be able to pick up any important species we may have missed.

Day 8

Lake Hawassa

This morning we embark on a journey west, driving to another Rift Valley Lake, Hawassa. We will make short stops on the way. Quite different from the alkaline lakes to the north, with its mountainous background, the lake is one of Ethiopia's most beautiful lakes and is home to a huge population of birds, and walking along the shores one can also see Hippo. Black-and-white Colobus, Grivet Monkeys and Olive Baboons are also common in the area.



Thick-billed Raven © Helen Pinchin

The star attractions here are the very localised African Spotted Creeper and the near-endemic Abyssinian Crimsonwing. In addition, the endemic and extraordinary-looking Thick-billed Raven is common here. Other species we may well come across at Hawassa include Goliath Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, Hadada Ibis, Knob-billed Duck, African Pygmy Goose, Long-crested Eagle, Grey Kestrel, Eurasian Moorhen, African Swamp-hen, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Blue-headed Coucal, Woodland, Grey-headed and Giant Kingfishers, Northern Carmine and Little Bee-eaters, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Double-toothed Barbet, Red-throated Wryneck, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrike, White-browed Robin-Chat, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, African Thrush, Sedge and Lesser Swamp Warblers, Red-faced Crombec, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Grosbeak Weaver, Bronze Mannikin and Violet-backed Starling. If we are fortunate, we could see Western Banded Snake Eagle. We will spend another two nights in the Haile Resort at their Hawassa location.

Day 9

Lake Hawassa (Wondo Genet)

After breakfast at the hotel, we will travel to Wondo Genet, where a local guide will take us for a walk through the forests on the eastern slopes of the Rift Valley, where we will search for a range of forest species including Narina Trogon, White-cheeked Turaco, Tambourine Dove, raptors such as Crowned Eagle and Black (Great) Sparrowhawk, and the endemic Yellow-fronted Parrot.

After lunch back at our hotel, we will spend the afternoon in Amora Gedel Park, Hawassa. This attractive lakeside park holds Grivet Monkey and Nile Monitor, with a chance of encountering a resident pack of Spotted Hyena. Birding highlights here may include Black Crake and African Spotted Creeper, along with excellent opportunities to enjoy close views of species such as African Fish Eagle, Ethiopian Bee-eater, Double-toothed Barbet and the near-endemic Banded Barbet in the late afternoon light.

Day 10

Robe

We begin the day with a visit to the lively Hawassa fish market, where we can expect an excellent selection of waterbirds such as Great White Pelican, Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns, Grey-headed and Black-headed Gulls, and both Yellow-billed and Marabou Storks. A nearby coffee stop also offers the chance to see the near-endemic Black-winged Lovebird around nesting sites.

We then set off on a scenic travel day, leaving the Rift Valley and heading towards the



Bohor Reedbuck

highlands. Our route takes us through the wheat-growing areas near Dodola, where we pause to look for the endemic Erlanger's Lark and the near-endemic Rusty-breasted Wheatear. From here, we continue over a high mountain pass at around 3,500m east of Washa before descending into the grassland basin around Dinsho.

Several planned stops in this area provide opportunities to search for key endemic and near-endemic species, including Cape Eagle-Owl, Abyssinian Longclaw, Blue-winged Goose, Rouget's Rail and Abyssinian Owl. The rich grasslands also support good numbers of mammals, including Mountain Nyala. We continue in the late afternoon to spend the night at a Nurobe Hotel in Robe.

Day 11

Goba (Bale Mountains)

The Bale Mountains, lying between 2,895m and 4,440m, 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. They are green and spacious, decorated with rocky peaks and crags, numerous small lakes, extensive heathland, magnificent cloudforests and bogs, and possess an exceptional beauty and charm which can be likened to that of the Scottish Highlands.

Today we travel into the Bale Mountains, driving up the northern slopes towards the Sanetti Plateau and then descending into the upper edge of the Harenna Forest to the south. As we climb, we will make birding stops on the north side of the range, where species such as Rouget's Rail, Wattled Ibis and Ethiopian Siskin can often be encountered along the roadside and in nearby fields and wetlands.

Our first main stop is planned at a small pond on the edge of the plateau, an excellent spot for highland specialities including Red-throated Pipit, Thekla's Lark, and the endemic Blue-winged Goose and Spot-breasted Lapwing. This area also offers our first realistic opportunity to look for the endangered Ethiopian Wolf, which may be seen quartering the grasslands in search of rodents. Continuing across the Sanetti Plateau, we will explore the open



Ethiopian Wolf

Afro-alpine scenery and look out for an impressive variety of raptors, with possibilities including Lanner Falcon, Pallid Harrier, and eagles such as Golden, Tawny and Steppe, alongside the ever-present Augur Buzzard.

As we drop down into the Harenna Forest on the southern slopes, we enter a very different habitat of lush montane forest. Here we will search for forest raptors such as Ayres's Hawk-Eagle and Mountain Buzzard, and a range of forest birds including African Emerald Cuckoo and the endemic Abyssinian Catbird. Later in the day, we return over the mountains to our accommodation in Goba, where we will spend the next two nights, with further chances en route to see highland mammals including Guereza, Mountain Nyala, Klippspringer, and endemic plateau specialists such as Starck's Hare, Blick's Grass Rat and Giant Mole-rat.

Day 12

Goba (Sanetti Plateau)

We have another full day to explore the Bale Mountains from our base in Goba, with a focus on both the lower farmland slopes and the Sanetti Plateau. We begin with a morning walk through farmland just above the town, where hedgerows, fields and scattered trees provide excellent birding. This area can offer wonderful views of species such as Rüppell's Robin-Chat and White-backed Black Tit, among others, and is also a traditional site for Abyssinian Woodpecker, which we will make a particular effort to find.



Later in the morning we return to the Sanetti Plateau, revisiting the Afro-alpine moorlands, small lakes and grasslands that form the core habitat of the Ethiopian Wolf. We will spend unhurried time exploring the plateau by vehicle and on short walks, scanning for wolves and other highland specialities. A picnic or lodge-style lunch overlooking one of the plateau lakes may produce additional waterbirds, with occasional surprises such as African Fish Eagle or Northern Pintail.

During the afternoon, we continue to tour the plateau tracks, aiming for further close-range encounters with Ethiopian Wolf and other key highland species. We also look for a supporting cast of Afro-alpine birds, including Wattled Crane. By late afternoon we return to our hotel, reflecting on two full days in one of Africa's most remarkable high-mountain landscapes.

Day 13

Fly Addis; inbound flights

For those not opting for the cultural extension to Omo, after a final breakfast and a walk around the hotel grounds, we head to Goba Airport to take the flight back to Addis Ababa. We will have day rooms booked at a convenient hotel, giving us the opportunity to freshen up, re-pack and enjoy a farewell dinner before returning to the airport for our flight home, which typically departs in the early hours of the morning.

After an early lunch we can set off on our city tour, driving north up to Mount Entoto. In 1881 Emperor Menelik II made his permanent camp there, after remains of an old town (believed to have been the capital of 16th-century monarch Lebna Dengel) were discovered, which Menelik took as a divine and auspicious sign.

Addis Ababa, at between 2,300-2,500m, is the third highest capital in the world and Entoto is a few hundred metres higher – as we drive up the hill there is an appreciable drop in temperature and the air is filled with the scent of the eucalyptus trees which line the road. From the top, there is a panoramic view of the capital and surrounding countryside. Entoto is an important watershed; to the north, water flows to the Blue Nile, and to the south, to the Awash River. Your guide will point out the important landmarks of the city.

Entoto was soon abandoned as a site for the capital – it was cold, difficult to provision and there was a shortage of wood. Empress Taytu was said to have led the move down to the plain of Finfine and to have named the new capital Addis Ababa, or New Flower. However, two important structures remain within the old imperial compound on Entoto: the churches of Mariam and the Archangel Raguel. It was in the church of Mariam that Menelik was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia in 1889, and in the small museum in the compound there are various clothes, court and household implements and weapons dating from the period. The church

of Raguel is unusual in that it is octagonal rather than round. There is a first-storey balustrade around which Menelik liked to stroll.

Leaving the churches we descend to Addis Ababa, stopping off at the National Archaeological Museum. Here we can see exhibits ranging from the 3.2-million-year-old bones of Lucy, through the Axumite and Gondarine periods to the monarchs Tewodros and Menelik.

Before returning to our hotel for dinner, we can stop off at some shops for souvenir and coffee shopping.



St. Raguel Ethiopian Orthodox Church built in the 1880s by Emperor Menelik II.

Optional Cultural Extension

Day 13 – 14

Konso

For those of us going on the extension, we will leave before the others, setting off for Konso, some 90 kilometres or about an hour and a half's drive. The Konso landscape is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, whilst the people of Konso are known for their intricately terraced hillsides, fine woven materials and the carved totems, waka, with which they decorate their graves.

We will visit a typical Konso village compound, a fortified, walled living area situated on a hill and hence easily defended, and the Konso museum. We can take an early lunch here before continuing on our journey to Turmi. Local restaurants offer the very healthy moringa, cooked as a kind of cabbage and served with hambasha, or local bread.

We pass the junction at Weita, home to the Tsemai people,



Konso

who are related to the Konso, and in the Weita River we will see pelicans and other aquatic birds. The next major settlement is Erbore, whose people are also related to the Konso and Tsemai, before arriving in Turmi. The drive from Konso will take 3-4 hours.

Turmi is home to the Hamer, a fine-looking people; both men and women take great pride in their appearance, shaving and colouring their hair, oiling their bodies and decorating themselves with beads and bracelets worn around arms and legs. We will also check for Evangadi, or Hamer dancing ceremonies.

For the next three nights we overnight in simple en suite cottages on the bank of the Kaske River.

This following morning, we head towards the Omo River, to Omo Rate, crossing the river in a dug-out canoe, visiting the Dassenech villages on the other side.

Day 15

Turmi

Today is market day in Turmi, but the market does not start early, so we will have time to go back to the Omo River to visit the villages of the Karo people. Among the people living along the Omo, the Karo excel in face and body painting. After lunch, we will visit the market and nearby Hamer villages.

Day 16

Jinka

After breakfast, we set off towards Jinka, one of the most developed towns in the region. Any visit to the Omo Valley should take in a market, where the various ethnic groups meet for both trade and socialisation. Today we will be able to see two vibrant markets: at Dimeke, just 30 minutes from Turmi, the Hamer and Bena coming from neighbouring areas, but we will not stop there and will push on to the more lively market at Alduba, attracting Hamer, Bena, Tsemai and Aari.

We will enjoy lunch in a local restaurant en route, arriving in Jinka mid-afternoon.

On arrival, we check in at Eco-Omo Lodge, and after a break we can explore the town. There is an interesting museum in Jinka, which, along with various artefacts, has a lot of ethnographical information about the people of the Omo.

Day 17 – 18

Fly Addis; inbound flights

We must get on the road early this morning, as we need to get back to Jinka by mid-morning to check in for our flight back to Addis Ababa at midday.

Leaving town, we drive to Mago National Park. Whilst the park has a variety of wildlife, the animals tend to stay away from the roads and sightings cannot be guaranteed, and therefore the main attraction in Mago is the Mursi people. We will drive to Shembel, the nearest Mursi village, about an hour from Jinka. The Mursi are known for their body scarification and (among the women) the wearing of lip plates. After our village visit, we return to Jinka to fly back to Addis Ababa, where we will have day rooms booked at a convenient hotel. After lunch we can set off on a short city tour, heading first to the National Archaeological Museum. Here we can see exhibits ranging from the 3.5-million-year-old bones of Lucy, through the Axumite and Gondarine periods to the monarchs Tewodros and Menelik.

After a fascinating day, we will return to our hotel, giving us the opportunity to freshen up, re-pack and enjoy a farewell dinner before returning to the airport for our flight home, which typically departs in the early hours of the morning.



Extra Expenses

All food and accommodation are 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\$62) – this can be purchased online in advance
- All items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs

- Tips

Tour Grading

We have graded this tour B, with a combination of walking and wildlife-viewing from our vehicle. There are some long road journeys, though this tour is designed to allow a more leisurely pace than some of our other itineraries! We will often be at altitudes of over 2,000m, and sometimes over 3,500m in the Bale Mountains, but the walking for the most part of the tour is not difficult, nor does it cover any great distance, and is always taken at a leisurely pace.

It is worth stressing that the tourist infrastructure in Ethiopia does not compare with the well-appointed lodges and camps of other East African destinations such as Kenya and Tanzania. Although this itinerary uses some of the best available accommodation in the country, it still isn't unusual to experience problems with electricity and plumbing or lack of maintenance. You should come prepared for en suite accommodation and a few problems like leaky plumbing, power cuts, lack of hot water, lights not working, slow service in the restaurant, etc., and hope to be pleasantly surprised! Many (though not all!) roads across the country are in excellent condition.

Tour Focus

This tour focuses on the best of Ethiopia's wildlife, including the birds and mammals, plus a little wider natural history. We will, of course, look at and enjoy anything that we are lucky enough to encounter. As birds are the most widespread members of the Ethiopian fauna, we will spend plenty of time birdwatching, as well as dedicating time and energy to searching for as many of Ethiopia's special mammals as possible. It should just be noted that large mammals are not abundant in Ethiopia, and those looking for a mammal-filled holiday to compare with the plains and savannahs of Southern and East Africa should look elsewhere in our brochure for their ideal holiday.

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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Naturetrek group in Nechisar National Park © Dan Lay, February 2025