

Ghana – The Butterflies of West Africa

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Depart London and overnight Accra

Day 2 Shai Hills

Day 3/4 Atewa Range

Day 5/6 Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary

Day 7/9 Kwabena Sam Forest

Day 10 Kakum National Park

Day 11 Depart Accra

Day 12 Arrive London

Departs

April / May

Focus

Butterflies

Grading

Grade A - Moderate day walks

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GHA04) or brochure

Highlights

- Ghana has over 900 species recorded, and this tour is timed for maximum numbers, with over 250 species
- Variety of forest locations for maximum species diversity
- Vibrantly colourful species of swallowtails, charaxes, foresters, fairy hairstreaks, gliders, and much more
- Led by butterfly expert local guides



*From top: Hewitson's Forester, Hebes Pink Forester, Gaudy Commadore
Images courtesy of Bill Berthet and Shutterstock*



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Introduction

Ghana is rapidly becoming West Africa's premier wildlife destination. This small tropical country – known in the past as the 'Gold Coast' – is now widely recognised as a friendly and safe destination to visit and is blessed with a diverse range of exciting habitats, including the rich Upper Guinea rainforests of the south. This 12-day tour, focusing on butterflies, will take you to the best forests in Ghana to see its endemic species as well as the more common species found in West Africa.

The Upper Guinean Forest Zone west of the Dahomey Gap was once continuous from Ghana to Sierra Leone, but now, unfortunately, due to excessive deforestation in the last century, only about 10% of the original forest cover remains. Ghana is one of the few West African countries where the idea of protecting forests came early enough to set up a network of national parks; some forest reserves also received protection due to a ban on logging for decades. Ghana is therefore still rich in rainforest areas, although many of them are degraded and only fragments of the once continuous forest area remain.

Still, over 900 species of butterflies have been recorded in Ghana, making it one of the best destinations to see the wonderful and dazzling butterflies of West Africa. This exciting new itinerary will take us to a variety of locations, including the renowned Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary as well as lesser-known reserves off the beaten track. All of these places are biodiversity hotspots, which is underlined by the sheer numbers and variety of butterflies that can be found. The butterfly season is from April to October, and this tour is timed to be at the peak of this season, so expect to see approximately 250 species on this tour, including many fabulous swallowtails, charaxes, foresters, fairy hairstreaks, gliders, sailers, and much more besides.

This is a relaxed tour led by expert local guides passionate about the conservation and wildlife of their country, and in particular the lepidoptera. In some locations, they will procure and lay fruit as bait to attract butterflies. The majority of species in Ghana are large and just as colourful and dramatic on the underside as they are on the upperside, meaning photographic opportunities are excellent.

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

Depart London

We depart London's Heathrow Airport on an early afternoon British Airways scheduled service to Accra, the capital city of Ghana, arriving mid-evening. After clearing immigration and customs, we will meet our local guide and transfer to a comfortable hotel for the night.

Day 2

Shai Hills

After an early breakfast, we will begin the tour at the Shai Hills reserve, an interesting expanse of savannah, grassland and woodland habitat that is more akin to that found in the north of the country. Home to Olive Baboons and various species of antelope, as well as many colourful birds such as Violet Turaco and Senegal Parrot, it is also a good area for butterflies. Such species that occur here are African Veined White, African Blue Pansy, Common, Small and Large Striped Swordtails, and usually species that you would more associate with forest habitat such as Common Forest Queen, Fashion Commodore, Widespread Forester and Equatorial Wanderer.

After a full morning in Shai Hills, and lunch in a nearby restaurant, we will embark on the 3.5 hour drive north-west to the upland evergreen forests of Atewa Range. Our hotel is conveniently located close to the area we will be exploring, and is our base for the next three nights.

Days 3 & 4

Atewa Forest Range

The Atewa Range is a series of steep-sided hills with relatively flat summits that run from north to south. The altitudes are unusual across the rest of Ghana, resulting in unique and localised biodiversity, including many species of mammals and birds hardly found elsewhere in the country. This is also the case with the butterflies, with the highest concentration of endemics across the country found here. In fact, there are nearly twice as many butterfly species found at Atewa Range



as in the whole of Europe! The forests here are under pressure from illegal logging and mining, despite a large tract of the range being designated a forest reserve. There are calls for this to be turned into a national park to help preserve this precious habitat yet further, and so by coming here to enjoy the butterflies, we are also helping to reinforce the need for greater protection for this little-visited reserve.

Common Red and Western Red Pentilas can be found here, with the latter especially unlikely to be found elsewhere in Ghana. Other such species that have only been recorded at Atewa are Riley's Swordtail, Cote d'Ivoire Glasswing, Moyamba Harlequin, Ceres Forester and Black-square Epitola. The extremely rare Giant African Swallowtail, which has the widest wingspan in the world, has been observed here, usually coming down from the canopy, where it spends most of its time, to drink from a water source. We will be extremely lucky to see any of these but it is possible. However, one of the highlights and targets of our visit here is the narrowly endemic Atewa Dotted Border, which is confined to a small part of the range.

Some of the more common species found here are the spectacular Western Mimic Forester, Green Orange Forester, Green-spotted Forester, Angola White Lady, Large Vagrant, Sabine Albatross, Brown Playboy, and Lunulate Hairtail.

Our days here will be broken up with lunch, but otherwise we will dedicate most of our time to enjoying the splendid variety of species Atewa has to offer.

Days 5 & 6

Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary

We set off early after breakfast, with our next destination being the world-famous Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary. It is just over a 2-hour drive from Atewa to Bobiri, so we will still be able to enjoy a full day's butterfly-watching and photography. The sanctuary is now only a 5,000-hectare fragment of the once continuous dry semi-deciduous rainforest that covered over a million hectares of land in Ghana. These types of forests have an unbelievably rich mixture of butterflies from the wet forests to guinea savannah. Results of extensive studies in Bobiri estimated the number of butterfly species to exceed 630, which is quite exceptional considering its size.



Citrus Swallowtail

The forest is unbelievably rich in *Bebearia*, *Euriphene*, *Euphaedra* and other fruit-feeding butterflies, including the beautiful Sophus Forester and Mottled-green Nymph. Charaxes or pashas are often seen along the main track in the forest and Liptena blues are frequently seen flying slowly near the guesthouse. The bamboo spot always has a good number of mud-puddling butterflies and sometimes clouds of African Nettle-trees and different species of Grass Yellows fly in clouds around the passing visitors. Also very likely are species with a large range, such as Spotted Hairtail, Citrus Swallowtail, Pale Babul Blue, Gaudy Commodore, White-barred Emperor and Pearl Charaxes.



Sophus Forester, Bill Berthet

We will stay very nearby for the next two nights, ensuring that we maximise our time in the field here. As such, we are likely to fall asleep to the nocturnal sounds of the forest, which will probably include Western Tree Hyrax calling.

Days 7, 8 & 9

Kwabena Sam Forest

We bid farewell to Bobiri and travel southwards for almost three hours to a forest location called Kwabena Sam, which has been discovered to have arguably the most diverse number of butterflies,

with many quality species. It is a very good, semi-degraded rainforest with a lot of open areas, which makes it a good site for West African butterflies, and is why we dedicate two and a half days here.

Here we will see many species of forester, nymph and charaxes, as well as swallowtail, spirit, pentila, epitola, sapphire and fairy hairstreak. Just some of the species we are likely to see here include Ashanti Forester, Laetitia's Forester, Hebes Pink Forester, Hewitson's Forester, Common Orange Forester, Gambia Nymph, Atossa Nymph, Bush Brown, Western Yellow-banded Swallowtail, Long-tailed Sapphire, Large Fairy Hairstreak, Small Flame-bordered Charaxes and Giant Charaxes, to name but a few.



Bush Brown, Bill Berthet

Kwabena Sam Forest is about 45 minutes' drive from the guesthouse that we will be staying at in Bonkro for the next three nights. This accommodation was built by our partners in Ghana, and is located next to Picathartes Forest, one of the last remaining strongholds of this enigmatic bird. The forest and accommodation are now managed by the community, which is an example of the positive effects of eco-tourism done in the right way. Previous Naturetrek clients that have stayed here have often cited this as their favourite accommodation in Ghana. Please see below for more information about this project.

Day 10

Kakum National Park

An early start this morning as we make the 2-hour drive south to Kakum National Park, which protects critically endangered primary Upper Guinea tropical rainforest and is home to a variety of exciting forest species of all animal groups. It is well known for its canopy walkway, which hangs 40 metres above the forest floor and affords the visitor a different vantage point from which to see the variety of mammals and birds that live here.

However, our focus, of course, will be the butterflies, and this is another excellent forest area for them. Kakum Fairy Hairstreak, Western Kakumia and Kakum Diopetes were named after the park by the famous butterfly expert and number one authority on West African butterflies, Torben B.



Common Red Glider, Robert Kilby

Larsen, who spent over a year here studying butterflies. Nine swallowtail species are found here, and it is also home to a wide range of pashas, including the Giant Charaxes and its mythological brother, the Black-bordered Charaxes. Other species with a large range also seen here include Common Hairstreak, Osiris Smokey Blue, Soldier and Fashion Commodores, Common Red Glider, Danaid Eggfly and Dark Blue

Pansy. One of the specialities in Kakum is Auberger's Yellow Glider, which is a rare West African endemic known only from Kakum in Ghana and two or three sites in Ivory Coast. The magnificent Giant African Skipper is quite common in the forest.

We will spend this evening in the nearby town of Jukwa.

Day 11

Kakum NP, in Flight

An early start as we head out for our final morning of butterfly-watching in and around Kakum National Park, aiming to find any new species. After lunch and an opportunity to freshen up, we set off for Accra where we will have dinner, before heading for the airport and our overnight flight home.

Day 12

Arrive London

This morning, we will arrive back at London Heathrow, where our tour will sadly come to an end.

Ankasa Extension

Day 11

Kakum NP, Ankasa

After the final morning with the rest of the group at Kakum National Park, we then head westwards after lunch towards Ankasa National Park, where we will be staying at the wonderful Ankasa Reserve Lodge located on the boundary of the forest. Being so close to this beautiful remote forest enables us to make the most of our time here over the next three nights. We will spend the next two full days exploring Ankasa, as there are many specialities to enjoy.

Days 12 & 13

Ankasa Reserve

These two days are spent exploring Ankasa, with the aim of seeing as many specialities as possible – those with western distribution that have the eastern edge of their range in the south-western corner of Ghana, including Veronica Nymph and Crowley's Forest Sylph. Others are associated with the wetter rainforest, such as Cinnamon Scarce Spirit and the magnificent Hadrian's White Charaxes. One of Africa's most delicate butterflies also occurs here. *Pseudopontiinae* is an ancient subfamily of *Pieridae*, consisting of only five species, four of which were recently described, based on DNA analysis. The Ankasa population belongs to the original Ghost (*Pseudopontia paradoxa*). The butterfly flies extremely slowly in the dense undergrowth of forest and is only located close to the main gate of the reserve.

Day 14

Kissi Forest, in Flight

We set off early this morning for the long, 8-hour drive back to Accra (8 hours without stops). We will break the journey up with a stop at Kissi Forest Reserve near Elmina. Here, we should find species such as Mocker and Citrus Swallowtails, along with the Common Forester. The Giant African Skipper is common here, but we might be lucky to see the smaller but similar Western Blue Policeman, which has a very narrow range along the western coast from Ghana to Liberia. The Kissi

Forest is also the type locality of the rare Maximiliano's Forest Swift, which is very rare throughout its entire range.

We continue our journey back to Accra, where we will have dinner, before heading for the airport and our overnight flight home.

Day 15

Arrive London

This morning, we will arrive back at London Heathrow, where our tour will sadly come to an end.



Perseis Mimic Forester, Bill Berthet



Common Yellow Glider, Bill Berthet

Tour grading

We have graded this tour A – easy walking. Whilst the pace is relaxed and walking distances quite short, up to 2 to 3 miles a day, it should be noted that the heat and humidity can be tiring, and some of the walks will be on narrow forest trails over hilly and forested terrain. As such, the tropical climate, coupled with the basic nature of the local infrastructure and some of the simple accommodation, demand at least a good level of fitness and an adventurous spirit! Each evening there will be the opportunity to go through photos to assist with identifications, as some independent explorations during the day will be encouraged.

How does this tour benefit the local community and wildlife?

We have worked with our agents in Ghana for decades now and are very pleased to be supporting their efforts to conserve precious habitat and wildlife in the country, as well as train brilliant local guides and support local communities. One such project is at Picathartes Forest, where our partners built the accommodation in Bonkro. We stay here as our base for visiting Kwabena Sam Forest, and the property is now managed by locals, with profits being shared amongst the community here. As a direct result of tourists visiting the Picathartes Forest and staying locally, deforestation that was a problem here not that long ago has stopped, and work is underway to reforest and make this habitat larger still. On our other Ghanaian tours that do visit Picathartes Forest to see this enigmatic species, representatives of the villages accompany our groups on their visit, with the aim of training quality local wildlife guides, and two schools have been built in the vicinity as well. Of course, the

wildlife has benefitted hugely from this, with *Picathartes* numbers growing and this now being the best and most reliable place in Ghana to see pangolin.

Weather

Ghana's climate is equatorial and tropical, with hot and humid conditions prevailing throughout the year. Temperatures typically average around 22°C in the morning, climbing to around 32°C in the afternoon with a high humidity of 80%. In April and May, you should expect and pack for the occasional afternoon cloudburst. The coastal strip tends to be drier and hotter than inland.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the cost of the holiday, along with park entrance fees, an unlimited supply of mineral water and morning pre-birding tea/coffee and biscuits.

Accommodation is in comfortable, but simple, guesthouses, hotels and community lodging in Bonkro. Single rooms are available at a supplement. All rooms have private facilities and air conditioning except at Bonkro which has fans. The lodgings at Bonkro only have a limited number of rooms, are clean but simple, with electricity sometimes limited to just the evenings.

Extra expenses

Please note that the following expenses are excluded from the cost of the holiday and are paid locally. Any necessary visas (\$260 for UK citizens as of August 2026), the required inoculations and anti-malarial tablets, drinks, tips and all items of a personal nature.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Ghana. 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 (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ghana).

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.