

Ghana's Highlights

Naturetrek Tour Report

2nd – 15th November 2025



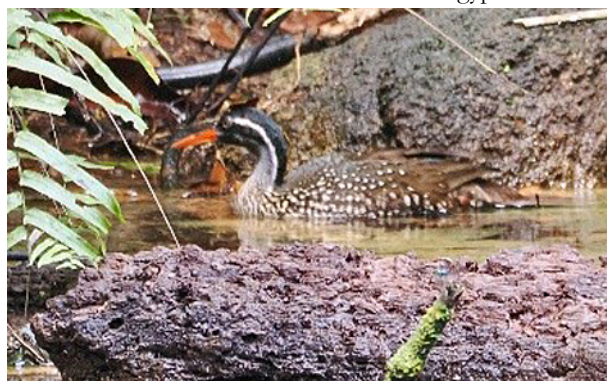
White-necked Rockfowl (Picathartes)



Egyptian Plover



Kakum rainforest canopy walkway



African Finfoot

Tour report by David Rumsey
Butterfly list courtesy of Nick Eldred



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Summary

Weather: Fine, hot but not unbearable, regular afternoon thunderstorms in the south which didn't last more than a couple of hours. Dry at Mole in the north.

Accommodation: Good to excellent, especially Ankasa Lodge. There was hardly any water pressure at the Mole Motel, so showers weren't possible. Rooms everywhere were spacious, clean and comfortable. Hotels were well situated, and the grounds were worth exploring for wildlife.

Food: The menu at Ankasa was extensive and varied with several types of fish and meat dishes. If anything, there was far too much choice for such a venue. Elsewhere the standard fare was chicken and rice. Fresh pineapple was outstanding, but for some reason bananas were never on offer, although we saw them being sold by the roadside.

Travel: Road travel was very tiresome. Regular police checks and speed bumps added to variable road quality, and road works meant that a two-hundred-mile journey could take as long as ten hours! There were two long travel days with limited wildlife spotting opportunities.

Day 1

Sunday 2nd November

After a convoluted journey by train and tube to Heathrow, we took off for Accra a little late, and arrived at our destination without any drama. Baggage collection took an age, and by the time we had met up with our tour guides and exchanged our currency it was quite late, and we arrived at Hotel Erata in downtown Accra at 9.30 pm. We didn't need to adjust to a different time zone.

Day 2

Monday 3rd November

We were up early for breakfast so that we could avoid the worst of Accra's notorious traffic. We spotted a few birds in the car park to whet our appetite for the days ahead. African Palm Swifts, Yellow-billed Kites and Laughing Doves became some of the most abundant and ubiquitous birds of the trip, and there was also an African Thrush, and a glimpse of a Double-toothed Barbet. We set off in our comfortable coach and enjoyed the sights and sounds of West Africa as we headed west along the coast road; our destination was the Ankasa evergreen forest. There were endless markets stalls and shops along the roadside, women carrying enormous bundles of every kind of produce on their heads, and a bewildering array of Christian messages assailing us on the buildings and vehicles. After a while, the journey became tedious as there was an almost complete absence of vegetation, and where there was some greenery, it was coated in a layer of red dust from the heavy road traffic. Parts of the road were unsurfaced and with that, regular road works and sleeping policemen, our progress was glacial. I had been warned about this, but it was a relief when, after several hours driving, we came to an area of grassland and scrub at Winniba Plain, where we disembarked and began our first proper birding.

Our first birds were a rather plain Tawny-flanked Prinia, and a rather shy and unshowy Brown Throated Wattle-eye (we never had any great sightings of wattle-eyes throughout the trip.) A beautiful Yellow-crowned Gonolek posed well for photos, and an African Grey Hornbill flew over. Andrew, our guide, heard some Guinea Turacos calling, and we watched as three or four flew from bush to bush, showing off red, purple and green flight feathers.

We didn't see any at rest, but then turacos are at their finest in flight, when they show off their colourful wings. These were the only Guinea Turacos we saw on the holiday. I was happy to get my best photo of a Green Wood Hoopoe, on top of a tree, and we also picked up a Red-winged Prinia, a Senegal Coucal and two White-throated Greenbuls. An African Hobby flew over.

We still had a long drive ahead of us, and again it seemed as if the urban sprawl would go on forever. There was little wildlife to see from the coach, other than hundreds of Yellow-billed Kites and Laughing Doves. Eventually, we stopped for a welcome break at Bokwo Pond, which at first glance yielded only a Little Grebe, Cattle Egrets and a lonesome White-faced Whistling Duck, but as we looked a bit harder, there was plenty to see. There were weaver colonies all around the lake, with Village being the most obvious, but also a few Orange and Olive-naped Weavers (recently split from Black-necked Weavers). An Osprey flew over carrying a fish. Then we saw two good birds which permitted photos: several Chestnut-and-black Weavers (recently split off from Vieillot's Weaver, which I had previously seen in Botswana, and which are all black), and a pair of Piping Hornbills, the best birds of the day for me. We enjoyed our stop and the birds kept coming, with a Woodland Kingfisher, two Little Bee-eaters, and Bar-breasted Firefinch.

We completed our journey to Ankasa, adding a few more common birds as we escaped the urban environment, such as African Pied Wagtail, West African Pied Hornbill, Little Swift, Common Bulbul and Grey-crowned Sparrow.

We were warmly welcomed at the Ankasa Lodge with fruit drinks, and had a splendid meal from a huge and diverse menu. We were shown to our spacious and comfortable rooms.

Day 3

Tuesday 4th November

As dawn broke, we were able to appreciate the fantastic setting we were in, as from our verandas we had a beautiful view down to the Ankasa River. We were situated on the edge of tropical evergreen rainforest, the largest in Ghana and reportedly the most biologically diverse. We had breakfast at 5.30am so we could be in the forest at the best time of day.

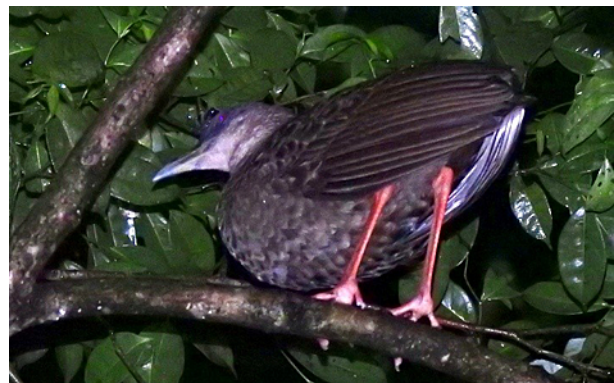
We took two beaten up old Land Rovers down a muddy and pitted track. Our drivers were excellent: it was no easy task navigating the water-filled potholes and ridges along the way. At intervals, we would leave the vehicle, walk down the track, and peer into the undergrowth or crane our necks to seek any bird movement in the canopy. Rainforest birding is notoriously difficult in any part of the world, for although there are numerous species, they are difficult to view as they either feed in the very high canopy, or skulk in the dark understorey. We relied on Andrew's tapes to lure birds, but there was a high failure rate and when we did spot something it was often either too quick or too distant for a satisfactory experience. We failed to attract a forest robin, although we spent a long time trying, and a Red-headed Malimbe was in so much darkness that it could barely be claimed as a sighting. We did find one of the sought after species, a Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, but we were directly below it and couldn't make out the key feature, namely the chocolate back. A Hairy-breasted Barbet sat at the top of a tall tree, silhouetted; happily, I got a good sighting and picture later in the holiday. A Yellow-spotted Barbet showed slightly better, but all too briefly. A Yellow bellied Crombec could have been any crombec, frankly! A couple of green pigeons were more viewable, but again distant.

We saw our first mammal of the trip, a Gambian Sun Squirrel, which looked rather like a large, elongated Grey Squirrel. We then attracted a Yellow billed Turaco, the forest equivalent of the Guinea Turaco, and very similar in appearance. I could make out the yellow bill, but it didn't hang around long enough for us to look for the other differentiating features. A Johanna's Sunbird arrived, and I managed to get some photos of this red-bellied bird. The best bird of the session was a Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill which appeared in an opening and gave us a good view for a fraction of a second. I managed to find a Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher for the group. We then moved on to an area cleared for electricity pylons, where at least we could get better light and perspective. There were several species of swift, swallow and spinetail, but they were very high and became confusing to pinpoint which was which. I could identify the saw-wings, but had trouble with the spinetails.

Our next stop along the track was at a pond, surrounded by thick vegetation and covered in heavy shade. There was a rudimentary wooden bench overlooking the waterhole, of which more later. From this vantage point we were able to enjoy a colony of Blue-billed Malimbos, a striking black and red bird related to the weavers. They had hanging nests all around the edge of the pond. A male African Finfoot was moving in and out of the shadows and vegetation; it was initially really difficult to see, but eventually it came into the open to allow better views. A couple of Dwarf Crocodiles were partially submerged, and we were able to make out a Chestnut-breasted Nigrita. The ride back was uncomfortable on the pitted and muddy road, and one of the Land Rovers got stuck; it was pulled out by the other vehicle. On the way back to the hotel, we glimpsed two beautiful Blue-headed Doves on the track, and then a pair of Grey-throated Rails ran ahead of us. Back at the Paradise Lodge I watched several West African Pied Hornbills (very common) and a Reichenbach's Sunbird, before we were hit with a tropical thunderstorm. The morning had been a bit of a disappointment, and set the tone for a few difficult days of challenging birding. There was some consolation in an array of large, colourful butterflies, a slippery African Clawed Toad, and a giant millipede.



Greyish Eagle-Owl



Nkulengu Rail

There was a massive tropical thunderstorm in the afternoon, but that didn't really change our plans, as it was during the heat of the day when we would be resting up anyway, before the evening shift. When the rain stopped after about an hour and a half, we set off again, having spotted a Pin-tailed Whydah in the garden. The track was now a quagmire of deep puddles, and the poor Land Rovers were lurching, pitching and rolling at alarming angles as we made our way down the same track to the open pylon area again. Again, we saw little in the forest, straining our eyes to see a Black-headed Oriole. As it was getting dark, the guides started playing an eerie and deafening bird call belonging to a Nkulengu Rail. They managed to find some roosting birds, and led us twenty minutes into the forest, where we saw four of these gigantic red-legged rails perched on the same branch just above our heads.

These birds are notoriously shy, so this was a good prize. I fell down a slippery bank on the way out, having foolishly refused help from the guides!

Day 4

Wednesday 5th November

We did more of the same this morning, with a visit to the pylons and the waterhole. Despite heavy rain in the night, we managed to negotiate the rutted track without incident. As before, birds were hidden in foliage, far away or silhouetted. We stopped at the pylons, on the look-out for Black-casqued Hornbills, but all we found were West African Pied, which proved to be a very common and approachable bird throughout the trip. Andrew then heard an African Emerald Cuckoo, high on my wish list, and we located it, but the light and its position against the sun made it difficult to appreciate its beautiful green and yellow colouring. We later saw a female of the species at a second, rather dried-up pond. We spent some considerable time at the Finfoot waterhole, as this was quite a productive site, but the peace was disturbed when the rudimentary bench gave way under the weight of its occupants, spilling a couple of guests onto the ground! Happily, no harm came to either person, or more importantly, their equipment.

We were targeting White-bellied Kingfisher, and after a while we were successful, although at first it was very uncooperative, hiding in tangled roots and branches in the shade. Eventually it showed quite well. We were aware of another attractive bird as nesting in the same habitat alongside the malimbos, the Black-bellied Seedcracker, a very smart little bird. These bright red and black birds were carrying nesting material. Shortly afterwards, we did well to find a Rufous-sided Broadbill putting on an amusing display of a hopping type flight display on his favourite branch. This tiny bird, with a big head and wide beak, was difficult to locate, but we all got good views, if only for a matter of seconds.

After another afternoon rainstorm had abated, we walked the entrance road, through crops, cacao orchards, relict woodland and villages. Again, the birds were not being highly cooperative; sunbirds, tinkerbirds and greenbuls were all scoped, but not seen well. The best sightings were of a tiny Klaas's Cuckoo and a Plain-backed Pipit. Then, as the sun went down, we waited for an eagle-owl that roosted in the vicinity: it was a no show, unfortunately. Some massive fruit bats were active and good to see, and some of the group thought for a moment that they were the owls we were looking for.

We settled down for dinner, but then Andrew interrupted the meal to report that he had found a potto by the perimeter gate, down by the river. We headed off at once to find it, but to Andrew's consternation we found the gates had been locked. We soon found a way around the gate, much to Andrew's concern as there was a sheer drop to the river! The West African Potto was very hard to locate as it was very high in a tree and merged into the branches and leaves. Eventually, by torchlight and eye shine, I saw it moving extremely slowly through a flowering tree, eating the blossom. It was rather like a larger and bulkier version of the Slender Loris I had once seen in India. At 9.00pm, a few of us went on a night walk in the same area, and were rewarded with a Demidoff's Dwarf Galago (bush baby) peeking out from behind a log. It didn't flee and we all got a great look. So, we had a great end of the day with mammals which compensated for a few failures with birds earlier.

Day 5

Thursday 6th November

This was our last morning at Ankasa. We returned to the forest track in the Land Rovers, but soon left the vehicles to walk a narrow path into the forest. Andrew was on the hunt for a Red-chested Owlet with the help of a call-

back. After a while we gave up and tried for an Orange-breasted Forest Robin instead. This time we had success, and this diminutive bird answered the call and occasionally appeared in the open to give us all a satisfactory sighting. Otherwise, a Slender-billed Greenbul, a partial sighting of a Sabine's Puffback and a Shiny Drongo represented the return for the morning's efforts.

It was time to say goodbye to Ankasa, and although the accommodation, hospitality and food had been first rate, some of us felt a little unlucky and hard done by with our birding experiences. Several hoped-for species such as Long-tailed Hornbill and Hartlaub's Duck, hadn't shown, and photography had been exceptionally difficult. It was time to get out on the open road and to search new habitats.

At noon, we left the resort and drove back in the direction we had come. We soon stopped at a roadside pool, and despite the heavy goods traffic roaring past, it was quite a relief to have some easy birding. I got decent pictures of an Orange Weaver and a Woodland Kingfisher. There were also Village and Chestnut-and-black Weavers, Spur-winged Lapwing, Red eyed Dove and Little Heron. We stopped at a small mangrove area specifically to find Mouse-brown Sunbirds, which we did. What was more impressive were the thousands of Little Swifts hawking low over the water. The rest of the day was a long, monotonous drive to the Rainforest Lodge, just outside the Kakum National Park. We arrived after dark.

Day 6

Friday 7th November

From our hotel, we explored an area of semi-protected forest close to the Reserve, where logging is allowed and there is a more open aspect. The walk started promisingly with a flock of Orange-winged Waxbills and a few Black-winged Bishops in an open, partially-cultivated area. An African Pygmy Kingfisher perched obligingly on a wire, and a passing raptor was identified by Andrew as a Red-chested Goshawk. A Double-toothed Barbet was seen, but was uncooperative, and a Splendid Starling perched on a distant tree stump. Thereafter, it was hard work again, with telescope sightings or all too brief encounters. A Western Oriole, a Tambourine Dove and a Red-tailed Greenbul all showed quite well, a Black Bee-eater was scoped (our only one of the fortnight) and a Bristle-nosed Barbet and female African Emerald Cuckoo were identified. Then the heavens opened and we had to retire to the hotel. We had some down time before our next excursion, so when the rain relented, I watched the garden birds, which proved more enjoyable than our trip to the forest, even if the birds were common. I had good views of a very colourful Splendid Sunbird, African Pied Wagtails, Northern Fiscal, Copper Sunbird, Tawny-backed Prinia, a flock of Bronze Mannikins and best of all, a lovely Northern Yellow White-eye.

The afternoon forest session was rather dull: we had overflying Red-faced Parrots, but silhouetted, a very brief Black-throated Coucal, an African Harrier-Hawk being mobbed by drongos, an Ussher's Flycatcher, and small flocks of Maxwell's Weavers. We again failed on an owl hunt, and Andrews's attempt to set up a moth trap was foiled by a faulty generator.

Day 7

Saturday 8th November

Today was the eagerly anticipated visit to the Canopy Walkway at the Kakum National Park. We arrived early to beat the crowds and to give ourselves the best chance of finding wildlife. After a stiff walk up to the entrance, we gazed, with varying degrees of trepidation, on the dramatic sight of rope bridges suspended from gigantic trees some thirty metres above the forest floor. Very narrow walkways were suspended by ropes with a rope barrier, leading to seven platforms attached to trees. Although it was perfectly safe, I found it very uncomfortable and

unsettling. What's more, I contrived to lose a lens cap of my binoculars on the way. Two group members actually saw it lying on the bridge, but were too terrified to bend down and pick it up. Henry was incredibly kind and let me have one of his for the remainder of the holiday.

The goal was to get to a platform and then survey the tree tops from eye level, giving us a much better chance of finding canopy birds. Despite our elevation, it was still hard going. Fanti Drongos, White-throated Bee Eaters, Ussher's Flycatcher and a Slender-billed Greenbul were all we could find, other than a fine pair of Palm-nut Vultures in the crown of a tree some distance away. After a little while, some more interesting birds arrived, all seeming to favour one particular tree, not too far from the platform: a rather scruffy-looking Violet-backed Starling, Golden Greenbul, White-breasted Nigrita, African Emerald Cuckoo, Yellow-mantled Weavers, Tit Hylia (Africa's smallest bird), and much to Andrew's excitement a Yellow-throated Cuckoo. A raptor soared over, later identified as a Honey Buzzard. A Slender-tailed Squirrel was our only mammal. Just as we were about to leave, one of the team spotted some movement in a very close bush, and there was a glorious Blue Malkoha (or Yellowbill).

Back at the car park were some beautiful Orange-headed Agama lizards sunning themselves. We returned later in the evening, hoping to use the observation tower, but it was closed. This time the walkways were thronged with noisy and cheerful schoolchildren crowded on the walkways and platforms, making the experience somewhat stressful. Despite the noise, a small group of Spot-nosed Monkeys were moving through, although they kept themselves quite well concealed. We were distracted by a large hornbill flying over the distant forest; Andrew identified it as a Brown-cheeked Hornbill. We could just about make out a pale bill and casque, and the white on the wings, but it was only in view for a few seconds. Nothing much happened for an hour, but finally a Black-casqued Hornbill flew to roost in the same area as the previous bird. It was all black, and had an enormous top-heavy black head. The large, casqued hornbills had been high on my wish list, so it was good to see them.

Day 8

Sunday 9th November

We left Kakum NP and headed north to the Picathartes Forest. First, we made a stop in an area of cultivation with scattered trees and small boggy pools. This was a productive site, and we kept turning up a variety of interesting species. We found Black-and-white Mannikin, Pale-fronted Nigrita, Black-winged Bishop, Red-vented Malimbe, Olive-bellied Sunbird, Tit Hylia, Forest Penduline Tit, Common Wattle-eye, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Western Nicator, Buff-spotted and Melancholy (or Gabon) Woodpeckers, Bristle-nosed, Vieillot's and Hairy breasted Barbets, Yellow throated and Yellow rumped Tinkerbirds, Lizard Buzzard and Puvel's Illadopsis. Unfortunately, the regular Rosy Bee-eaters were not on their favourite tree, and although we heard Spotted Flufftail, it was somewhere off in an impenetrable swamp. We went to a nearby river, where we saw a few Rock Pratincoles and a distant White-bibbed Swallow. In the afternoon, we arrived at the Picathartes Lodge, and once we had settled into our rooms, we were guided past the cacao plantations into the thick forest to look for the mythical Picathartes, more properly known now as White-necked Rockfowl.

We walked for about twenty minutes until we came to a huge boulder with an overhang. A basic bench seat had been constructed from which to look out for the birds, which promptly collapsed under the weight, just like the one at the pond in the Ankasa Forest! The White-necked Rockfowl were not spooked, however, and three birds duly arrived and began hopping, almost bouncing, about the area below the boulder. We could make out two swallow-like mud nests on the rock, and one of the birds flew into one of them. The light was fading and the shadow of the rock made photography difficult, but I was able to get a couple of passable photos when a rockfowl

moved to an area with more light. This strange looking beast is in a family of just two species, and is confined to thick jungle with large rocks and caves in West Africa. We enjoyed the spectacle for about half an hour before the three (or maybe) four birds left the area.

At 9.00 pm we returned to the same area of forest, this time hoping for a pangolin. Given our failures with owls, nightjars, flufftails and other birds, our hopes were not too high. We were totally dependent on Andrew and the guides to find one, and they relied on their sense of smell to detect a vinegary odour the pangolin emits, a result of its diet of ants. After stumbling around in the dark for forty minutes, we got the call from Andrew and hurried over to a tree where a Black-bellied Pangolin was curled up in a mass of debris, leaves and twigs on the side of a tree, two metres off the ground. Although we could only make out a mass of scales and one claw, it was undoubtedly a pangolin, and we were thrilled to see this elusive, secretive and threatened mammal. Overnight, we set a moth trap, which attracted some interesting moths, though nothing spectacular, and a few cicadas and mantises.

Day 9

Monday 10th November

Today was spent driving to Mole. We made just one stop at a roadside lake, where there were a flock of White-faced Whistling Ducks, Malachite Kingfisher, Spur-winged Lapwings and a few Four-banded Sandgrouse. Earlier, we had had a Grasshopper Buzzard on a roadside wire, and a Marsh Harrier that we originally misidentified as a Pallid Harrier. It was dark when we arrived at the Mole Hotel in the Mole National Park.

Day 10

Tuesday 11th November

We awoke to a super panorama of African savannah bush, with waterholes below us. Mole promised much more than previous venues, and immediately we could look down on several species of vulture, while Bateleurs soared above us. The hotel gardens were frequented by troops of Olive Baboons, attractive ginger Patas Monkeys, and Warthogs. The baboons were very bold, and one occasion a large male leapt onto our lunch table to steal some food. No amount of shouting or chair-throwing could scare him off, and he only left after being thrown some titbits. The speed, strength and size of this alpha male was impressive, and somewhat alarming. Goodness knows what injuries he could have inflicted had he been minded to do get violent!

Trees and bushes close to the hotel were alive with birds, and there were more waiting for us at the bottom of the escarpment. We drove around a small section of the reserve and got out for some walking close to a second waterhole. On our morning walk we saw Wilson's Indigobird, Pin-tailed Whydah, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Red-billed and Bar-chested Firefinches, Vitelline Masked and Olive-naped Weavers, Long-tailed Glossy Starling, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Northern Puffback, Beautiful Sunbird, White-shouldered Black Tit, African Paradise Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Grey Woodpecker, Northern Red-billed and African Grey Hornbills, Blue-bellied Rollers in flight, four species of kingfisher and Wattled Lapwings. I was particularly pleased to see White-headed Vultures, along with the more common White-backed and Hooded.

Although we couldn't expect to see the range of mammals that you get in East Africa, we did see a group of Gambian Mongooses cross the road (very stocky, unlike other mongooses I have seen), Green Monkeys and two large Elephants, and antelopes were represented by Kob and the attractive Northern Bushbuck, with its pattern of spots and stripes. The bird highlights for me were the Oriole Warbler, a flock of White-crested Helmetshrikes, and a nesting colony of Red-throated Bee-eaters. Other than the Bee-eaters, the birds we saw were too mobile or

skulking to allow good photography. A number of birds such as Tropical Boubou, Common Wattle-eye, White-crowned Robin Chat and Fine-spotted Woodpecker allowed only tantalising glimpses. A large Nile Monitor was draped in the branches of a tree.

After our usual afternoon rest after lunch, we headed off again in our coach, parked by the same waterhole, and walked the savannah. It was great to be able to go on foot in this type of environment, although we were accompanied by an armed ranger to protect us from Elephants and maybe Hyenas. We added Levillant's Cuckoo, Stone Partridge, cordon-bleus, Scarlet Sunbird and Senegal Eremorela to our bird list. Much of what we saw was on the track while we drove, including a pair of Abyssinian Ground Hornbills running ahead of us, which were a real highlight for me. At dusk, we headed for an area of open grassland for our target bird, Forbes's Plover, but before we found one, we checked out a small mixed flock of Sun Larks and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks. An Exclamatory Paradise Wydah flew by, showing its oddly-shaped and -proportioned tail. We eventually found a couple of Forbes's Plovers, but by now it was getting dark.

Day 11

Wednesday 12th November

This was the best day of the trip. We took a leisurely drive towards the White Volta River at Daboya. The habitat on the way was perfect, and we were constantly stopping the coach to jump out for a new bird sighting. The open countryside of grassland, scrub and mature trees attracted many new species and we had closer, better views of many we had seen previously on the tour. The light was good, and those of us who were keen on taking pictures were well pleased. We found our first Long-crested Eagle, and as we hopped back on the bus a group of Piapiacs was seen on a roof of a building. An Abyssinian Roller showed really well in a bare roadside tree, while a Northern Red Bishop posed on top of some long grass. One tree harboured several species of birds: Yellow-fronted Canary, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Pygmy and Superb Sunbirds and a Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. All showed well after a bit of patience. We also made stops for Grey Kestrel, African Grey Hornbill, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Lizard Buzzard, Speckled Pigeon, Vieillot's Barbet and Purple Glossy Starling, and most pleasing of all, for me at least, a Grey-headed Bushshrike, which I was keen to photograph. A Levillant's Cuckoo was flying to and fro across the road, but perched briefly to give us an excellent sighting.

We got to the river, having picked up a local guide, to find a new bridge under construction, which was a worry as it might have disturbed the habitat of our much-prized target for the day: the Egyptian Plover. At first, there was no sign, but as we walked along the low riverbank cliffs, a pair of these striking birds flew towards us and then settled on a sandbank right in front of us, giving amazing views. The distinctive patterning of this bird sets it aside from other waders, and it sits in its own family. Very happy with our success, we then drove back to the Motel with only one stop to admire some Bearded Barbets.

As usual, we avoided the hottest part of the day and set off again into the park in the late afternoon to visit the second waterhole again, devoting some time to enjoying the comings and goings of the Red-throated Bee-eaters which were active by their nesting holes; they were very close to the ground, and rather exposed to predators, we thought. We saw two Spur-winged Francolins and two Stone Partridges from the coach, and then finally had some success with an owl, when Andrew's tapes tempted a Pearl-spotted Owlet to show himself.

Later on, we went for a night drive with the reserve rangers. We all had to cram into one Toyota as the other one didn't turn up, but that didn't spoil our enjoyment of an excellent night-time nature foray. Andrew and the rangers scoured the bushes and ground with their torches for any eye shine. Our guide was excellent at identifying species

just from their eye reflections, and did very well to find us a Rusty-spotted Genet, which sat still for long enough for us to admire its sleek form and beautifully-marked coat. We also came across Senegal Thick-knees on the road on several occasions, a perched Greyish Eagle-Owl, and a sinister looking West African Crocodile, lurking in a roadside ditch.

Day 12

Thursday 13th November

Before we left Mole, we wandered around the gardens and saw some good birds. The best were three African Blue Flycatchers, which showed well, fanning out their long tails. We had our best sighting of Lavender Waxbill, Black-crowned Tchagra, Northern Black Flycatchers, (impersonating drongos), Senegal Parrots showing well in flight, an African Woolly-necked Stork in the open down by the waterhole, and two rather distant White-headed Vultures. Some Bruce's Green Pigeons were beautiful, a Violet Turaco flew into a tree but was mainly obscured, a male Western Violet-backed Sunbird was a good sighting, and there were also Yellow fronted Canaries, African Jacanas, Hadada Ibises, a Yellow-crowned Gonolek, White-shouldered Black Tit, Northern Puffback, Pygmy Sunbird and a Giant Kingfisher. Then it was off to the airport, with a quick stop to see the thirteenth-century mosque. Unlike Ghana's road network, the airport infrastructure is first-rate, and we travelled in great comfort for just two hours to get back to Accra (compared to ten hours by road). It was dark by the time we returned to the Erata Hotel.

Day 13

Friday 14th November

This was our last day in Ghana. We set off through the mind-numbingly congested roads of Accra early to beat the traffic and to walk in the Shai Hills, an area of grassland, savannah, woodland and rocky cliffs. Our big target was the Mocking Cliff Chat, but no matter how hard we scanned the cliffs and bushes there was nothing to be seen, except for a piece of vegetation which resembled the bird. After it hadn't moved for ten minutes, we realised our error! We did get a good scope view of a pair of Double-toothed Barbets, but that was about it. We decided it was time to move on.

After lunch, we headed to Accra Docks and Sakumona Lagoon. The drive through the massive container port was interminable, but finally we arrived at the lagoon, separated from the sea by a railway and a road, with heavy traffic. We scanned the water, finding Black-winged Stilts, Wood Sandpipers, Great and Yellow-billed Egrets, Senegal Thick-knees and Reed Cormorants. A Black-winged Kite hovered over the water, but best of all was an impressive flock of about two hundred Collared Pratincoles resting close to the shore. We then found a quieter area of the lake, where there were Black Herons, a distant Osprey, Copper-tailed Starlings (which looked very similar to Purple Glossy Starlings to the untrained eye), and there was a nice sight of a dozen Pied Kingfishers perched in one tree.

Our flight from Accra was on time.

Day 14

Saturday 15th November

We arrived back at Heathrow in the early hours of Saturday morning.

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Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name
White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
Stone Partridge	<i>Ptilopachus petrosus</i>
Double-spurred Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis bicalcaratus</i>
Long-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus climacurus</i>
Sabine's Spinetail	<i>Rhaphidura sabini</i>
Cassin's Spinetail	<i>Neafrapus cassini</i>
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Western Plantain-eater	<i>Crinifer piscator</i>
Violet Turaco	<i>Tauraco violaceus</i>
Yellow-billed Turaco	<i>Tauraco macrorhynchus</i>
Guinea Turaco	<i>Tauraco persa</i>
Black-throated Coucal	<i>Centropus leucogaster</i>
Senegal Coucal	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>
Blue Malkoha	<i>Ceuthmochares aereus</i>
Levaillant's Cuckoo	<i>Clamator levaillantii</i>
Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>
Klaas's Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>
Yellow-throated Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx flavigularis</i>
African Emerald Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx cupreus</i>
Four-banded Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles quadricinctus</i>
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba guinea</i>
Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
Vinaceous Dove	<i>Streptopelia vinacea</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
Black-billed Wood Dove	<i>Turtur abyssinicus</i>
Tambourine Dove	<i>Turtur tympanistria</i>
Blue-headed Wood Dove	<i>Turtur brehmeri</i>
Bruce's Green Pigeon	<i>Treron waalia</i>
African Green Pigeon	<i>Treron calvus</i>
African Finfoot	<i>Podica senegalensis</i>
Grey-throated Rail	<i>Canirallus oculus</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Nkulengu Rail	<i>Himantornis haematopus</i>
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Senegal Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus senegalensis</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Forbes's Plover	<i>Charadrius forbesi</i>
Spur-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>
African Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>
Egyptian Plover	<i>Pluvianus aegyptius</i>
African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Rock Pratincole	<i>Glareola nuchalis</i>
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>
African Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia microscelis</i>
Reed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Western Reef Heron	<i>Egretta gularis</i>
Little Heron	<i>Butorides atricapilla</i>
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Yellow-billed Egret	<i>Ardea brachyrhyncha</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
African Harrier-Hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
Palm-nut Vulture	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
White-headed Vulture	<i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>
Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>
White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>
Lizard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
Grasshopper Buzzard	<i>Butastur rufipennis</i>
Pearl-spotted Owlet	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>
Greyish Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo cinerascens</i>
Green Wood Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>
Abyssinian Ground Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus abyssinicus</i>
Northern Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>
West African Pied Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros semifasciatus</i>
African Grey Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros nasutus</i>
Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros camurus</i>
Piping Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes fistulator</i>
Brown-cheeked Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes cylindricus</i>
Black-casqued Hornbill	<i>Ceratogymna atrata</i>
Abyssinian Roller	<i>Coracias abyssinicus</i>
Blue-bellied Roller	<i>Coracias cyanogaster</i>
Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>
Chocolate-backed Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon badia</i>
Grey-headed Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>
Blue-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon malimbica</i>
Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>
African Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ispidina picta</i>
White-bellied Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis leucogaster</i>
Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>
Giant Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Black Bee-eater	<i>Merops gularis</i>
Little Bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>
Red-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullocki</i>

Common name	Scientific name
White-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops albicollis</i>
Bristle-nosed Barbet	<i>Gymnobucco peli</i>
Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus bilineatus</i>
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus chrysoconus</i>
Yellow-spotted Barbet	<i>Buccanodon duchaillui</i>
Hairy-breasted Barbet	<i>Tricholaema hirsuta</i>
Vieillot's Barbet	<i>Lybius vieillotii</i>
Double-toothed Barbet	<i>Pogonornis bidentatus</i>
Bearded Barbet	<i>Pogonornis dubius</i>
Melancholy Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos lugubris</i>
African Grey Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos goertae</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Grey Kestrel	<i>Falco ardosiaceus</i>
African Hobby	<i>Falco cuvierii</i>
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
Senegal Parrot	<i>Poicephalus senegalus</i>
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Rufous-sided Broadbill	<i>Smithornis rufolateralis</i>
Brown-throated Wattle-eye	<i>Platysteira cyanea</i>
Grey-headed Bushshrike	<i>Malaconotus blanchoti</i>
Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>
Sabine's Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus sabini</i>
Northern Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus gambensis</i>
Yellow-crowned Gonolek	<i>Laniarius barbarus</i>
White-crested Helmetshrike	<i>Prionops plumatus</i>
White-breasted Cuckooshrike	<i>Cebilepyris pectoralis</i>
Western Oriole	<i>Oriolus brachyrynchus</i>
Black-winged Oriole	<i>Oriolus nigripennis</i>
Velvet-mantled Drongo	<i>Dicrurus modestus</i>
Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone rufiventer</i>
African Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
Yellow-billed Shrike	<i>Lanius corvinus</i>
Northern Fiscal	<i>Lanius humeralis</i>
Piapiac	<i>Ptilostomus afer</i>
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
White-necked Rockfowl (Picathartes)	<i>Picathartes gymnocephalus</i>
African Blue Flycatcher	<i>Elminia longicauda</i>
White-shouldered Black Tit	<i>Melaniparus guineensis</i>
Forest Penduline Tit	<i>Anthoscopus flavifrons</i>
Western Nicator	<i>Nicator chloris</i>
Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix leucotis</i>
Sun Lark	<i>Galerida modesta</i>
Slender-billed Greenbul	<i>Stelgidillas gracilirostris</i>
Golden Greenbul	<i>Calyptocichla serinus</i>
White-throated Greenbul	<i>Phyllastrephus albigularis</i>
Icterine Greenbul	<i>Phyllastrephus icterinus</i>
Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Square-tailed Saw-wing	<i>Psalidoprocne nitens</i>
Fanti Saw-wing	<i>Psalidoprocne obscura</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
White-bibbed Swallow	<i>Hirundo nigrita</i>
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Green Crombec	<i>Sylvietta virens</i>
Lemon-bellied Crombec	<i>Sylvietta denti</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Green Hylia	<i>Hylia prasina</i>
Tit Hylia	<i>Pholidornis rushiae</i>
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
Short-winged Cisticola	<i>Cisticola brachypterus</i>
Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>
Red-winged Prinia	<i>Prinia erythroptera</i>
Yellow-breasted Apalis	<i>Apalis flavida</i>
Oriole Warbler	<i>Hypergerus atriceps</i>
Senegal Eremomela	<i>Eremomela pusilla</i>
Puvel's Illadopsis	<i>Illadopsis puveli</i>
Northern Yellow White-eye	<i>Zosterops senegalensis</i>
Copper-tailed Starling	<i>Hylopsar cupreocauda</i>
Bronze-tailed Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalcurus</i>
Purple Starling	<i>Lamprotornis purpureus</i>
Long-tailed Glossy Starling	<i>Lamprotornis caudatus</i>
Violet-backed Starling	<i>Cinnyricinclus leucogaster</i>
African Thrush	<i>Turdus pelios</i>
Grey Tit-Flycatcher	<i>Fraseria plumbea</i>
Northern Black Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis edolioides</i>
Ussher's Flycatcher	<i>Artomyias ussheri</i>
Orange-breasted Forest Robin	<i>Stiphornis erythrothorax</i>
Snowy-crowned Robin-chat	<i>Cossypha niveicapilla</i>
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Mangrove Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes gabonicus</i>
Western Violet-backed Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes longuemarei</i>
Little Green Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes seimundi</i>
Pygmy Sunbird	<i>Hedydipna platura</i>
Reichenbach's Sunbird	<i>Anabathmis reichenbachii</i>
Blue-throated Brown Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra cyanolaema</i>
Olive Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra olivacea</i>
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra senegalensis</i>
Olive-bellied Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris chloropygius</i>
Splendid Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris coccinigastrus</i>
Johanna's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris johannae</i>
Superb Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris superbus</i>
Copper Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris cupreus</i>
Northern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer griseus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Little Weaver	<i>Ploceus luteolus</i>
Olive-naped Weaver	<i>Ploceus brachypterus</i>
Orange Weaver	<i>Ploceus aurantius</i>
Vitelline Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus vitellinus</i>
Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>
Chestnut-and-black Weaver	<i>Ploceus castaneofuscus</i>
Yellow-mantled Weaver	<i>Ploceus tricolor</i>
Maxwell's Black Weaver	<i>Ploceus albinucha</i>
Compact Weaver	<i>Ploceus superciliosus</i>
Blue-billed Malimbe	<i>Malimbus nitens</i>
Red-headed Malimbe	<i>Malimbus rubicollis</i>
Red-headed Quelea	<i>Quelea erythrops</i>
Black-winged Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes hordeaceus</i>
Northern Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes franciscanus</i>
Bronze Mannikin	<i>Spermestes cucullata</i>
Black-and-white Mannikin	<i>Spermestes bicolor</i>
White-breasted Nigrita	<i>Nigrita fusconotus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Chestnut-breasted Nigrita	<i>Nigrita bicolor</i>
Lavender Waxbill	<i>Glaucestrilda caerulescens</i>
Orange-cheeked Waxbill	<i>Estrilda melpoda</i>
Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu	<i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>
Black-bellied Seedcracker	<i>Pyrenestes ostrinus</i>
Red-billed Firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>
Bar-breasted Firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta rufopicta</i>
Village Indigobird	<i>Vidua chalybeata</i>
Wilson's Indigobird	<i>Vidua wilsoni</i>
Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>
Exclamatory Paradise Whydah	<i>Vidua interjecta</i>
African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>
Plain-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus leucophrys</i>
Yellow-fronted Canary	<i>Crithagra mozambica</i>
Gosling's Bunting	<i>Emberiza goslingi</i>

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name
African Savanna Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>
Green Monkey	<i>Chlorocebus sabaeus</i>
Common Patas Monkey	<i>Erythrocebus patas</i>
Spot-nosed Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus petaurista</i>
Olive Baboon	<i>Papio anubis</i>
Demidoff's Dwarf Galago	<i>Galagoides demidoff</i>
West African Potto	<i>Perodicticus potto</i>
African Savanna Hare	<i>Lepus microtis</i>
Gambian Sun Squirrel	<i>Heliosciurus gambianus</i>
Slender-tailed Squirrel	<i>Protoxerus aubinnii</i>
Striped Ground Squirrel	<i>Euxerus erythropus</i>
African Straw-colored Fruit Bat	<i>Eidolon helvum</i>
Yellow-winged False-vampire	<i>Lavia frons</i>
Black-bellied Pangolin	<i>Phataginus tetradactylus</i>
Gambian Mongoose	<i>Mungos gambianus</i>
Rusty-spotted Genet	<i>Genetta fieldiana</i>
Kob	<i>Kobus kob</i>
Northern Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>
Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>

Amphibians & reptiles

Common name	Scientific name
African Clawed Toad	<i>Xenopus laevis</i>
Orange-headed Agama	<i>Agama agama</i>
Nile Monitor	<i>Varanus niloticus</i>
Dwarf Crocodile	<i>Osteolaemus tetraspis</i>
West African Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus suchus</i>

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name
Citrus Swallowtail	<i>Papilio demodocus</i>
Angola White Lady	<i>Graphium angolanus</i>
Coppery Swordtail	<i>Graphium adamastor</i>
Large Striped Swordtail	<i>Graphium antheus</i>
Veined Swordtail	<i>Graphium leonidas</i>
African Caper	<i>Belenois creona</i>
Calypso White	<i>Belenois calypso</i>
Forest Caper White	<i>Belenois theora</i>
Chloris Dotted Border	<i>Mylothris chloris</i>
Equatorial Wanderer	<i>Colotis evippe</i>
Round-winged Orange Tip	<i>Colotis euippe</i>
Desjardin's Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema desjardinsii</i>
Fairy Hairstreak	<i>Hypolycaena liara</i>
Spotted Ciliate Blue	<i>Anthene larydas</i>
African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna</i>
Common Chalk Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>
Pale Babul Blue	<i>Azanus moriqua</i>
Simple Liptena	<i>Liptena simplex</i>
a Telipna	<i>Telipna sp.</i>
Plain Tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>
Light Bush Brown	<i>Bicyclus dorothea</i>
Western Hallelesis	<i>Hallelesis halyma</i>
Common Leopard	<i>Phalanta phalantha</i>
Common Joker	<i>Byblia anvatara</i>
Little Commodore	<i>Junonia sophia</i>
Soldier Commodore	<i>Junonia terea</i>
Dark Blue Pansy	<i>Junonia oenone</i>
Common Diadem	<i>Hypolimnas anthedon</i>
Danaid Eggfly	<i>Hypolimnas misippus</i>
Blue Diadem	<i>Hypolimnas salmacis</i>
Common Red Glider	<i>Cymothoe coccinata</i>
Lurid Glider	<i>Cymothoe lurida</i>
Common Blue-banded Forester	<i>Euphaedra gausape</i>
Hebes Pink Forester	<i>Euphaedra hebes</i>
Ceres Forester	<i>Euphaedra ceres</i>
Pathfinder	<i>Euphaedra phaethusa</i>
a Sprite	<i>Celaenorrhinus maesseni</i>