

Ethiopia

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

Depart UK

We'll depart London in the evening on our overnight flight to Addis Ababa.

Days 2 & 3

Debre Libanos & the Jemma Valley

We'll arrive at seven in the morning and head straight up into the wild mountain country around the monastery complex at Debre Libanos. En route we'll cross the Sululta Plains where we'll have our first encounters with Blue-winged Geese as well as groups of Black and White Storks.

Debre Libanos was founded in the 13th century at the site of a cave where Saint Tekle Haymanot was believed to have meditated for 29 years. There are none of the original buildings left, most of what you can see dates from the very recent past, but the wonder of Debre Libanos is as a site of pilgrimage, and in its spectacular location. We'll have time to visit the monastery where White-winged Cliffchats hop about the roofs and photographing Lammergeiers is possible nearby if we put bones out for them! Endemic White-billed Starlings allow close approach. Here we'll find the endemic Gelada Baboon, each animal adorned with a 'bleeding heart'. They range over the cliff faces around Debre Libanos in large troupes, feeding continuously due to their nutrient-poor diet of grass, and we'll be able to get great views of the impressive alpha males. In the woodlands above we'll find Abyssinian Orioles, Banded Barbets, and fabulous White-cheeked Turacos.

Today we'll follow the Jemma Valley to Ankobar, a short distance, so a lot of time in the field. The mix of cliffs, rocky outcrops, dry scrub and deep ravines provides an impressive variety of structural habitats and therefore a great range of wildlife. *Tapinanthus pennatulus*, a mistletoe with red flowers, parasitises many of the acacias in this area. Pretty *Kalanchoe lanceolata* will be in flower and we'll see *Kniphofia* and Aloes blooming by the road. We'll seek endemic Harwood's Francolin en route and we'll spend further time with the troupes of Gelada Baboons. Nyanza Swifts arc through the skies as we watch Green Wood-Hoopoe, Black-winged Bishop and the elegant Straw-tailed Whydah.

Day 4 & 5 (am)

Ankobar

The scenery at Ankobar is really impressive. Indeed our hotel, the Ankobar Palace Lodge, a reconstruction of the Emperor Menelik's Palace, is in an incomparable

location with immense views over the Great Rift Valley. On the slopes of the escarpment farmers plant euphorbias to create fences around their houses or corrals for their livestock and some of these have been in situ for a long time and have grown so impressively that they look more like some kind of green fortification rather than a fence. In these areas we will look for Erkel's Francolin. In dry areas we'll find *Cucumis phrophetarum* whose globular hook-spined fruits are known from the Dead Sea all the way down through East Africa. Shining Sunbirds and Nile Valley Sunbirds visit the flowering Aloes and we'll see Yellow-breasted Barbet, Fox Kestrel and the unique Bare-faced Go-away Bird.

Days 5(pm) – 8(am) **Awash National Park**

The acacia-dotted thornveld that dominates much of Awash is extremely rich in both bird and animal life. Troupes of impressive Hamadryas Baboons forage across the plains and we'll come across Jackals from time to time, both Black-backed and Golden. Unstriped Ground Squirrels skitter out from under the feet of Somali Ostriches as Harar Dik-diks step daintily across the track. Bustards are always a highlight whenever one sees them and whichever species, so here we are going to have many highlights, for Awash is one of the very best Bustard sites in the whole continent. As well as stately Kori Bustards and Arabian Bustards, we'll also see the elegant Hartlaub's Bustards and both White-bellied Bustards and Buff-crested Bustards. The Awash Gorge is home to family groups of Guereza Black-and-White Colobus as well as some great birds like Meyer's Parrot, Cut-throat and Striped Kingfisher. Awash has a good diversity of dragonflies, notably the scarlet Red Groundling, richly coloured Blue Basker, and rainbow-hued *Platycypha caligata*.

We'll see groups of Sommering's Gazelles and Beisa Oryx, and stopping to photograph these we realize that a Pygmy Falcon, Rosy-patched Bushshrike, or a flock of Bristle-crowned Starlings are perched in the acacias around us. Beautiful Northern Lesser Kudu will draw much appreciation, so too lots of stunning Northern Carmine Bee-eaters. There are plenty of great ground dwelling birds in Awash ranging from the hulking Abyssinian Ground Hornbill to exquisite Harlequin Quail and from cryptic Chestnut-bellied and Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse to gorgeous little flocks of Purple Grenadiers. We'll continue to find new birds more or less continuously - Yellow-necked Francolins, Boran Cisticola, White Helmetshrike, Red-winged and Gillet's Larks, Somali Bunting, Pallid Harrier, and that archetypical master of the African skies, the Bateleur.

As dusk falls on the slopes of Mount Fantalle, a dormant volcano, we'll watch Spotted Hyenas emerging from the black lava caves that are a famous denning site for these enigmatic creatures. Rock Hyraxes keep a wary eye on their strong-jawed neighbours. The African Wild Cat is often seen in daylight along the tracks however we've an even better chance at night when we'll also likely encounter both Jackals and Bat-eared Foxes too.

Days 8(pm) - 12(am)

Bale Mountains. The Sanetti Plateau, Gaysay Grasslands and Harena Forest.

The highest asphalt road in Africa takes us up to the summit regions of the Bale Mountains where we'll spend time watching and photographing the Horn of Africa's most iconic mammal, the Ethiopian (or Simien) Wolf. We'll watch them stalking through the heathy moorlands of the Sanetti Plateau the beautiful landscape dotted with Giant Lobelias and Red Hot Pokers – this is the main flowering season in these highlands. The afro-alpine moorland certainly has a rich diversity of plant life but it still seems staggering that it can support no less than 4000kg biomass of rodents per hectare! Many of these are Giant Mole-rats, chunky one kilo rodents, the wolf's chief prey, and this abundance of rodents also supports an array of eagles – Steppe, Tawny, Golden, Lesser Spotted, Greater Spotted, and the striking Verreaux's Eagle.

Our gorgeous lodge looks out over Juniper-Hagenia woodland known locally as Tid, where we'll find Abyssinian Crimsonwings and Yellow-bellied Waxbills. *Schefflera volkensii*, *Erythrina brucei*, *Galiniera saxifraga*, *Allophylus abyssinicus*, *Dombeya torrida*, *Ficus ovata*, *Prunus africana*, *Croton macrostachyus*, *Maytenus addat* and *Canthium oligocarpum* are other major constituents of the upper parts of the Harena moist montane forest close by the lodge. Prominent amongst these is *Hagenia abyssinica*, the male flowers yellow and female ones pink, these used by the locals to make an infusion to get rid of tapeworms. Close to the escarpment edge are extensive bamboo zones, an important habitat for the elusive and endemic Bale Monkey and on the cliffs themselves we'll look for the recently split Ethiopian Klipspringer.

Kniphofia foliosa adorns the Gaysay Grasslands with their thick yellow pokers, and amongst the grasses and sedges we'll find familiar looking umbels – yes, it really is *Ferula communis*! Another familiar plant, to European botanists, is the Giant Heath, *Erica arborea*, which forms significant stands, sometimes with *Erica trimera*. By upland pools are Blue-winged Geese, Ruddy Shelduck and beautifully plumaged Spot-breasted Lapwings. We'll spend an evening watching the grasslands for Serval, we've a good chance of seeing this gorgeous cat here. As we wait for them to appear we can enjoy the spectacular red blooms of *Ammocharis tinneana* and striped *Crinum abyssinicum* as well as the crenulated white flowers of the sea daffodil relative *Pancratium tenuifolium*. There are mounds of white *Helichrysum meyeri* and also *Drimia* and *Cooperiana* species in flower. The extraordinary sight of stands of the giant thistle *Echinops ellenbecki*, the large but otherwise fairly normal spikey foliage topped by an extraordinary globose head on a stick. This is bright red when in flower, but when not has the appearance of one of those rather scary Doctor Who scarecrows.

The undulating plateau of the central part of the Bale Mountains will provide us with the chance to easily explore one of the best examples of Afroalpine vegetation in the continent. The higher moorlands are covered in *Helichrysums*, notably cushion-like

Helichrysum citrispinum and silvery *Helichrysum splendidum*, as well as half a dozen other *Helichrysum* species and many *Alchemilla* species. Most striking is the endemic giant lobelia (*Lobelia rhyncoptalum*) which stands up to 10m high including its inflorescence, and is scattered across the landscape even up to Tullu Deemtu, at 4377m the highest point in these mountains. If we are lucky we'll find one in bloom and very likely it will be attended by fabulous Malachite Sunbirds. In these silvery moorlands we'll see plenty of the elegant endemic Mountain Nyala as well as Reedbuck and Warthogs, and occasional Wattled Cranes. We'll seek Menelik's Bushbuck and endemic birds such as Abyssinian Owl and Abyssinian Catbird. Little pools in the forest attract dragonflies such as Epaulet Skimmer, the brilliant red Kirby's Dropwing, and the superb *Paplopleura portia*, whose wings are splotched black with a white pterostigma. Bush Duikers and Stark's Hares will be seen as we walk amongst the Lobelias and we'll likely flush an Abyssinian Longclaw or two. Mountain Buzzard and Ayre's Hawk-Eagle soar overhead and this is a great area for Lammergeiers. Flocks of Slender-billed Starling commute back and forth across the moorlands and by our lodge we should watch for Rameron Pigeon and the simply gorgeous African Emerald Cuckoo.

Days 12 (pm) – 14

Lake Langano and Bishangari

We'll descend through the lower Harena forest where the plant life is dominated by *Combretum molle* and *Terminalia brownii*, and forest species like *Warburgia ugandensis*, *Celtis africana* and *Podocarpus falcatus*, with an understory of wild coffee *Coffea arabica*. We'll see Yellow-crowned Canary and White-backed Tit before we descend the rift walls, Thick-billed Ravens and Rüppell's Vultures thermalling as the warm air rises from the rift floor.

We'll finish the tour with two days relaxing at the superb Bishangari Lodge on the shores of a Rift Valley Lake. Gambian Sun Squirrels flush Lemon Doves and Narina Trogons from the majestic figs along the lake shore by the lodge. The lush vegetation is in some contrast with the dry bush country further back from the lake shore. There Abyssinian Ground Hornbills and Clapperton's Francolins stalk through bush decked out with the yellow-tipped orange pokers of *Aloe volkensii* and an assortment of yellow Crotalarias. But amongst the lush fig forest are stands of superb *Gloriosa superba*, the red pompoms of *Scadoxus multiflorus*, the white spires of *Gynandropsis gynandra*, rather like an overgrown cleome, and starbursts of white blooms that cover shrubby *Maerua edulis*. A special feature here are the Cycads, *Encephalarotus tegulaneus*. Here is an abundance of typically brilliant African birds such as White-cheeked Turaco, Silvery-cheeked Hornbills, various tinkerbirds, bee-eaters, and barbets, as well as endemics such as the Black-winged Lovebird and Yellow-fronted Parrot. Orange-breasted Bushshrike has the most lovely plumage, and we'll also see Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, Brown-throated Wattle-eye and Banded Barbet.

Spotlighting will reveal Civet, White-tailed Mongoose, Common Genet, Golden Jackal and Bushbabies. Slender-tailed Nightjars sit on the tracks and we may well also see a Duiker or two and Spotted Hyena. During the afternoon of Day 14 we'll return to Addis Ababa in preparation for our departure the next morning

Day 15 Departure

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