

# Ethiopia

## Bargain Birdwatching Tour (Christmas Departure)

### Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

2009/2010

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#### Dates

Friday 18th December – Sunday 27th December 2009

Friday 17th December – Sunday 26th December 2010

#### Cost

£1,795 (London/London); £1,295 (Addis Ababa/Addis Ababa)

#### Single room supplement

£180

#### Grading

Grade A

#### Focus

Birds with some mammal content



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**NB. 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.**

## Introduction

Ethiopia is a fascinating and welcoming country. The climate is warm and comfortable all year round and the bird life is exceptional. The scenery is stunning; there are masses of lakes surrounded by mountainous peaks, dusty valleys dotted with acacia trees and pretty little thatched huts surrounding well kept villages. The people of this country are proud and happy and for the most part self sufficient. Ethiopia provides its own power (from the many lakes!), grows its own crops and keeps very many cattle. The traditionally robed ponies and their riders seen along the moorlands, plus donkeys carrying their mixed cargo all round the country, provide an interesting cultural backdrop to a week of sensational bird and mammal watching. There is no shortage of culture and history, and many fascinating sites can be added onto your holiday if you would like to extend your time to explore this fascinating country.

It is worth stressing, however, that whilst the tourist infrastructure in Ethiopia is improving, facilities such as hotels, vehicles and many of the roads are of a much lower standard than other more popular African destinations such as Kenya, Tanzania and southern Africa. As such, when travelling in Ethiopia it is necessary to accept that the itinerary may not always run like clockwork, the roads may be poor on occasion, the vehicles a little cramped and some of the hotels may be basic in nature and lacking in some of the comforts found in western hotels. What is needed more than anything, therefore, is a good sense of adventure and if you come equipped with this you are sure to enjoy the fascinating birds, animals, culture and landscapes of this unique beautiful African country.

## Day 1

Friday

### In Flight

We leave from London Heathrow on Ethiopian Airlines' scheduled evening flight to Addis Ababa.

## Day 2

Saturday

### Addis Ababa

Arriving in Addis around 0800 hours (local time), we transfer to a comfortable city hotel. Our first Ethiopian birds are likely to include the Ruppell's and Hooded Vultures, the peculiar endemic Thick-billed Ravens, plus such less obtrusive species as Brown-rumped Seed-eaters, Grey-headed Sparrows, Baglafecht's Weavers, Abyssinian Slaty and Dusky Flycatchers, African Rock Martins, Tacazze Sunbirds, Red-eyed and Dusky Turtle Doves, and endemic Wattled Ibises and White-collared Pigeons.

This afternoon we will travel a short distance to Gafersa Reservoir, a magnificent and rewarding habitat just outside the city, where a range of bush and wetland species can include as many as a quarter of Ethiopia's 29 endemic birds. Blue-winged Goose, Wattled Ibis, Rouget's Rail, Abyssinian Longclaw, Banded Barbet and Black-headed Siskin are amongst the endemics that may be seen.

**Day 3****Sunday****Awash National Park**

We will rise early this morning and spend most of the day driving slowly to the Awash National Park, birdwatching as we go. As we cross flat, dry farmlands there is little of scenic interest, but the roadside birds are in plenty: Augur Buzzards, Long-crested Eagles, Carmine Bee-eaters, Abyssinian and Rufous-crowned Rollers to name but a few. We will stop for lunch in the small farming town of Nazareth, and later at Lake Basaaka to look for Nile Crocodiles and waterbirds. We should reach Awash in late afternoon, in time to enjoy the beautiful sunset over the park and to see the first of this area's interesting birdlife. For our 2-night in Awash we will be camping at the park's official campsite alongside the tree-lined Awash River - there is no other suitable accommodation within the park.

**Day 4****Monday****Awash National Park**

We will spend today exploring Awash National Park by a mix of bird and mammal watching drives and walks. The beauty of Awash is that visitors can explore it on foot, for it is free from typical east African park restrictions, and most dangerous mammals. Spanning 350 square miles, Awash became the first of Ethiopia's national parks in 1966. It is situated on the Awash River, with its spectacular gorges, and is made up of acacia and scrub-bound plains, with hills and the volcano, Mount Fantalle, in its northern quarter. Ethiopia's troubles over the last few decades, including population displacement and wars, have taken their toll on the country's wildlife and large mammals populations have declined markedly. Even so, during our time in Awash we still hope to find Beisa Oryx, Lesser Kudu, Defassa Waterbuck, Soemmering's Gazelle, Warthog, Salts Dik-dik and Olive Baboons. Predators are rare though Lion, Leopard and Caracal, have been seen on previous Naturetrek tours. The birdlife is exceptional, however, and includes Buff-crested, White-bellied, Kori, and even Arabian Bustards, Lichtenstein's and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Rosy-patched and other shrikes, plus many species of hornbills, weavers, woodpeckers, vultures, doves, pigeons, guineafowl, glossy starlings, parrots, bee-eaters, barbets, mousebirds and finches, to name but a few!

This evening we may be able to head out on a night-drive along the tracks close to the campsite. This will provide us with the chance of an encounter with one or two of the nocturnal mammals, perhaps a Spotted Hyena, Bat-eared Fox, African Wild Cat, African Civet, Abyssinian Genet or Abyssinian Hare!

**Day 5****Tuesday****Lake Langano**

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

The lake's waters are deep and sterile, devoid of birdlife, but the acacia woodland around the lodge makes fine amends! Dark Chanting Goshawks, African Fish Eagles, Hemprich's and Von der Decken's Hornbills, Cardinal

Woodpeckers, White-bellied Go-away Birds, Red-billed and White-headed Buffalo Weavers, White-crowned Shrikes, Blue-naped Mousebirds, Little Bee-eaters, Mariqua Sunbirds and a variety of colourful finches are all to be found in this dry and thorny habitat.

## Day 6 Wednesday

### Wondo Guenet

Lake Abiata is Ethiopia's Nakuru and set within the Rift Valley Lakes National Park, only a short distance from Lake Langano. Although this small park has suffered recently from the pressures of overgrazing and population growth, it still remains a fantastic place for waterbirds and is Ethiopia's only Ramsar site. Shallow and saline in nature, Abiata is ringed with a pink flush of flamingos and is also home to numerous other birds including pelicans, waders, cormorants and herons. In the distance, to the east and west, loom the great walls of the Rift Valley. To reach the lake shore we must drive down a bumpy road for a few kilometres then walk a further kilometre to the waters edge.

After lunch we will complete the drive to Wondo Guenet Forest (about 2 hours) where we will overnight in its comfortable guest house.

## Day 7

## Thursday

### Wondo Guenet

From this hillside retreat, the views of the fertile farmlands in the valley below and of Lake Awassa are quite beautiful. It is easy to see why Wondo Guenet was once a favoured haunt of Haile Selassie's daughter. In the gardens, jacarandas, roses, amaryllis and bougainvilleas provide abundant colour and a home for sunbirds, woodpeckers, Silvery-cheeked Hornbills, White-browed Robin Chats, Double-toothed Barbets, African Firefinches and a host of other species. In the forested valley close by, four endemics may be found: Black-headed Forest Oriole, Yellow-fronted Parrot, White-winged Cliff Chat and Golden-backed Woodpecker, whilst Half-collared Kingfishers, Spotted Creepers, African Hobbies, Crowned Eagles and Olive Pigeons are amongst other specialities of the region. Birdwatching here can be as relaxing or exhausting as you choose it to be. You may prefer to enjoy the view and the birds from the terrace of the bar, or to walk just as far as the natural hot shower, which cascades from a nearby stream. You may decide to scramble on precipitous slopes in search of elusive White-winged Cliff Chats. The choice is yours! If time permits we will visit the Forest Research Institute, and explore the wonderful virgin forest above it. We spend a second night at the Wondo Guenet Guest House.

## Day 8

## Friday

### Lake Awassa

Sadly we must leave Wondo Guenet behind this morning, and drop a short distance back down into the Rift Valley. This time we will stay at Lake Awassa, a beautiful freshwater lake, set amongst hills and a luxuriant vegetation, quite unlike the alkaline lakes to the north. Amongst the lilies and great reedbeds that encompass the lake we should find Black, Goliath and other herons, the ugly Marabou Stork, Hamerkops, Hadada Ibis, a variety of egrets, dainty Pygmy Geese, Fulvous and White-faced Whistling Ducks, Knob-billed Duck, Black Crakes, African Jacanas, Three-banded Plovers, Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns and Kingfishers - Pied and Malachite. Nearby, in the mature acacia woodland that conceals our lodge, a host of landbirds complements this spectacle.

Here we will search for Grey-headed and Woodland Kingfishers, Red-breasted Wrynecks, Green Wood-hoopoes, Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrikes, White-browed Robin Chats, African Thrushes, Rufous Chatterers, Swamp Warblers, Red-faced Crombecs, Wattle-eyes, Puffbacks, Spotted Creepers, and many other colourful species. Birds are so very plentiful here that little energy is required in finding them.

We will have a full day today to enjoy Awassa's magnificent spectacle of waterbirds. If time permits we may visit the Sidamo fishermen as they land their catches of Tilapia and Catfish, and gut and fillet them by the lake. Here the air is alive with birds, their relationship with these fishermen being entirely harmonious. In the afternoon we will visit an area of riverine forest close to the lake where we can expect a different variety of birds, and hopefully get some good views of the beautiful Black and White Colobus Monkeys. We spend the night at Lake Awassa Hotel.

## Day 9

Saturday

### Addis Ababa

Making an early start, we will continue our drive up the Rift Valley northwards towards Addis Ababa, a journey of 267 kilometres. En route we will stop at Lake Zwai once again to take another look at the waterbird spectacle and then onto Lake Hora, a forest-lined crater lake, and a wonderful place to break the long journey. Birdwatching around the lake may be rewarded with such species as Red-knobbed Coot, Hottentot Teal, Ferruginous and other diving ducks, as well as Banded Barbets, White-winged Cliff Chats, and other interesting passerines. We will reach Addis in time for an evening meal and a chance to freshen up before travelling to the airport for the London flight departing early the following morning.

## Day 10

Sunday

### London

We depart Addis Ababa on Ethiopian Airlines' scheduled early morning to London Heathrow, arriving there approximately 0715.

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## Extensions

As you will appreciate, our 10-day holiday to Ethiopia is short and action-packed! Inevitably there are many other interesting places to visit in Ethiopia should you have time. As the majority of your holiday cost is spent on air fares, we would strongly recommend an extension to your holiday by several nights or longer.

A short domestic flight to the north will open up such exciting areas as Lake Tana, the Blue Nile Gorge, the castles of Gondar and the unique rock-hewn churches of Lalibela. Alternatively, visit some additional national parks or extra birdwatching sites around the country. Please call the Naturetrek office for more details and prices.

## Tour grading

This is a straightforward birding tour that makes no great physical demands, and should be well within the capabilities of anyone of any age who enjoys travel in Third World countries.

Please note: If you are wanting a hotel tour of high standards and luxury travel, then this may not be the trip for you - however, if you enjoy travel in third world countries and want an excellent standard of birdwatching amongst friendly people and great landscapes, then you will love Ethiopia!

## Weather

The rainy season in Ethiopia usually runs from June until early October. Therefore, dry and sunny weather should be expected during our tours which take place in the dry season. Daytime temperatures range from 20oC to the low 30soC and whilst cloud is likely in the afternoons but does not usually bring rain. A list of suggested clothing to bring is included in our pre-departure information.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the price. You should be aware that there are no luxury lodges in Ethiopia! We use the best available accommodation at each site, but this is generally of very simple standard, all rooms are clean and en-suite and restaurant food is basic but adequate. There is usually a mix of western food or traditional Ethiopian food available.

For our 2-nights in Awash National Park we will be camping alongside the Awash River. The tents will be set up by local camp staff who will also erect a couple of toilet tents and a dining table. The tents themselves are equipped with mattresses and blankets, so a sleeping bag is not required. Pillows are generally not provided. Meals are also cooked by the camp staff.

## Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: all items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs and tips.

## Entry requirements

UK passport holders do need a visa for Ethiopia, which is currently £12.00 per person; we will send you the relevant forms around 6 weeks before departure. A Yellow Fever vaccination certificate is no longer mandatory for those people travelling direct to Ethiopia from the UK, but a vaccination is still advised. Please discuss your travel plans with your GP well in advance of travel.

## How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus the insurance premium if required. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051, and we will gladly send you one. Alternatively you may book on line at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) or call us and make a telephone booking with a credit or debit card.

Please note that as all our Bargain Selection tours are carefully costed on groups of at least 10 persons to maximise value for money, it may be necessary to impose a small group surcharge of 10% on groups falling short of this size.