

I travelled to Ethiopia in December 2014 and January 2015. This mound of drivel is part of my Ethiopian Adventure. As I don't expect anybody to read a 10,000 word 30+ page document, I have ordered it into four convenient parts.

	Component	Description
Part I	The Volcano Adventure	<p>The main reason I went to Ethiopia was to see Erta Ale as I had been fascinated by this volcano for over a decade.</p> <p>17 pages</p>
Part II	Roads & Drivers	<p>These deserve their own report as the drivers were amazingly good and all this on some downright terrifying roads.</p> <p>This is serious 4WD territory</p> <p>7 pages</p>
Part III	Photos of Me	<p>The most frequent complaint that I receive about my holiday reports is that there are virtually no photos of me¹. As I travel solo and am insufficiently self absorbed to indulge in the narcissism of the selfie, this is a selection of photos taken by others where I am in the frame.</p> <p>6 pages</p>
Part IV	The Birding Section	<p>After the volcano tour I did a 3½ day bespoke birding tour which was absolutely brilliant in a completely different way.</p> <p>9 pages</p>

This component of my tour was organised through Australian-based Icon Adventures.
www.iconadventures.com

My Ethiopian ornithologist guide was Alazar Daka Ruffo who is based in Addis Ababa.
alazar.ruffo@gmail.com

¹ For the life of me I can't see why this is an issue that anybody would want to complain about.

My birding tour was essentially tacked on to my volcano tour and had to fit in between when the volcano tour ended and take into account Orthodox Christmas (7 January). Consequently there were locations that were less than ideal and would have been omitted in any other situation. Furthermore a more seriously organised tour would have arranged for a longer time at better quality locations. A specialised birdwatching tour in Ethiopia would be 8 – 9 days which could anticipate seeing between 300 to 400 different bird species. Notwithstanding all that I managed to cram in some serious birding.

Armed with a copy of Birds of the Horn of Africa by Nigel Redman, Terry Stevenson & John Fanshawe² I commenced my birding being picked up at Addis domestic airport by my guide, Alazar, and driver, Ayu. We then drove south to the lakes area which comprises a series of lakes in the Rift Valley; it was a complete change of pace from the volcano tour. Due to the geological activity different lakes have different chemical compositions and support different habitats. The lakes that I visited, in order, were Koka Dam, Lake Ziway, Lake Langano, Lake Abiata, Lake Shala and Lake Awassa.

There is a wide range of birdlife and even waterways that would be considered drains managed to yield impressive numbers of birds, at least seven on one waterway. The only negative at this stage was that I had left my telephoto lens in my suitcase and couldn't do any photographing on the first day. This is a pity because you miss out on the three Kingfishers.

Our first stop was Koka Dam which is a reservoir for the dam which was built to provide hydroelectric power. There were amazing fig trees by the dam with African Fish Eagles perched in the upper branches. The dam is quite rich in fish so there I saw the Little Stint, Hammerkop, Grey Heron and Spur Winged Plover.

We then travelled on to Lake Ziway which is also very rich in fish leading to an array of birdlife. This is where I saw the three Kingfishers, Pied, Malachite and Pygmy. The vegetation was quite dense along some of the lake edge and the three kingfishers were perching on branches and plunge diving. Unfortunately I didn't see any of them being successful.



Black Winged Stilts

The next morning we firstly went to Lake Abiata which is an asset/alkaline (?) lake and is experiencing a drop in water levels due to soda ash extraction. There were masses of Lesser and Greater Flamingos. It was here that I started experimenting with a telephoto lens as many of the birds were out on the lake and they were not that comfortable with people so walking to the water's edge made them fly away.

The lakes are situated in the Abiata Shala National Park,

however there are locals living there herding their goats. They still carry their traditional spears, a bit like an accessory.

Lake Abiata and Lake Shala are only a couple of kilometres apart and from the lookout they seem a bit like Wineglass Bay in Tasmania. They are very different lakes as Lake Shala is a freshwater lake although it is nowhere near as fertile as Lake Ziway. There was some wildlife in the national park including Ostriches and Grants Gazelle.

² This is the absolute bible for bird watching in the region. It is also an excellent guide which I found very easy to use.



Lesser Flamingos



While driving to Lake Shala in the National Park I saw the very beautiful Tacazze Sunbird plus Isabelline Wheatear and Fork Tailed Drongo. There are hot springs at the lake which the locals use for washing, etc so they activities around there were rather domestic. We walked along the water's edge and saw Crowned Lapwing, the tiny Little Stint, Common Greenshank plus a male and female Namaqua Dove getting to know each other better.

We then went back to the woodland area and had a bit of a walk where we saw a Tawny Eagle nesting on a pylon and a Black Billed Wood Hopoe. A White Bellied Go Away Bird definitely tried to make us go away.

My first two nights' accommodation was at Africa Vacation Club which is on the shores of Lake Langano. The grounds also supported a variety of birdlife. Early morning and evening walks in the hotel grounds could yield an amazing variety of bird life



Tawny Eagle on Nest



Superb Starling

The Superb Starlings were everywhere their iridescent colours were absolutely amazing. They often came around the outdoor dining area particularly at meal times.

I became accustomed to the little Yellow Wagtails as they are quite common in the region, they are rather a pretty little bird. Also in the hotel grounds I saw Little Bee Eater, Speckled Mousebird, Willow Warbler, African Grey Hornbill, Greater Blue Eared Starling, Eurasian Hopoe and Great Cormorant.



Little Bee Eater



Yellow Wagtail

There were masses of White Browed Sparrow Weavers plus the remnants of their nests however they weren't nesting at this time.



African Grey Hornbill



White Browed Sparrow Weaver

I started getting better at bird photography, I realised what is important is to get the bird in the right light and then hope that they give you a nice profile. It is one of those activities that practice does tend to improve results.



Great Cormorant



Laughing Dove

I haven't cropped any of these photos, and I concede cropping could improve a number.



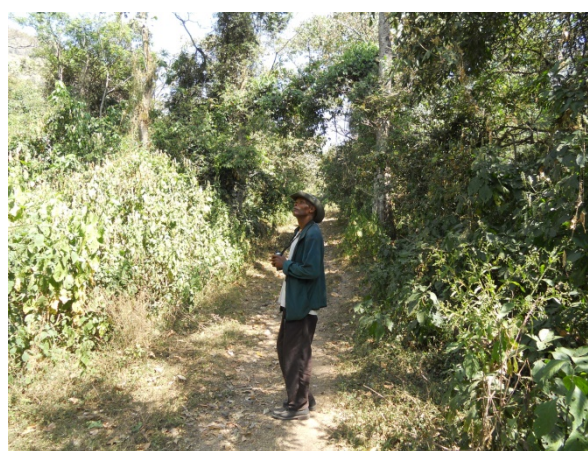
Village children playing chicken

I had to give these kids their own frame; they lived in a village near the resort/hotel where I was staying. They delighted in playing chicken by dancing (Ethiopian style) and then jumping out of the way. In a lot of ways it reminded me of parts of my childhood when tourists started to discover Outback Australia. As I was then one of the local kids we would find ways of annoying the out-of-towners. At least these Ethiopian kids didn't throw rocks.

The next day we travelled south to Lake Awasa the highlight on the way was stopping at the Wondo Genet College of Forestry and Natural Resources which is part of Hawassa University.

The real highlight was the campus. This is over 80 hectares including buildings and some cultivation. The majority of the site was endemic forest (not a eucalyptus tree in sight) and the bird life was amazing. Our guide was Mekonnen who had lived on the campus for over 15 years and he knew the area like the (proverbial) back of his hand. He was able to take us to a variety of spots and pretty much predict what we were going to see.

After an Ethiopian coffee one of the many campus cafes we headed out unfortunately as the vegetation was rather heavy photography wasn't that easy.



Our campus guide Mekonnen



Silvery Cheeked Hornbill

The sheer number of birds was actually amazing and it was here that I saw African Paradise Flycatcher, Red Shouldered Cuckoo Shrike, Red Eyed Dove, Silvery Cheeked Hornbill and Mountain Thrush (more on him later).

We spent some time looking for Abyssinian Orioles and were rewarded when we saw a group. While their lovely yellow colour is quite bright, in the heavy foliage they can look quite dull.

Mekonnen was very good on bird calls as well, not only did

he know where birds will most likely to be he also could recognise all calls and pretty much lead us to the best position. We also saw Yellow Fronted Parrot, Narina Trogon, Great Sparrow Hawk (just sitting still) Green Twinspot (they are gorgeous), Ethiopian Boubou ³, Common Bulbul, Red Headed Weaver,

³ Which I had seen earlier at Awash Lodge

Nubian Woodpecker and Brown Throated Wattle Eye. We also saw the White Cheeked Turaco which had the most amazing red wings when flying.

The campus had also a few non-avian residents, namely Colobus Monkeys and Vervet Monkeys. Colobus Monkeys are black and white with long white tails. Vervet Monkeys are rather cute and look like how you imagine monkeys to look like. They can be a serious nuisance as I noticed the campus buildings all had chicken wire over the windows to keep out the monkeys.



Colobus Monkeys



Vervet Monkeys



Got by a Mountain Thrush

Another highlight was that I was got by a Mountain Thrush. In Ethiopia if a bird poops on your hat it means that you are blessed, there must be something significant about bird poop and millinery as in western culture it means good luck. Whether blessed or lucky I appear to have got 2015 off to an auspicious start.

We spent a good 2 – 3 hours walking and although the Highlands are much cooler than the desert, it did start to get a bit warm in the middle of the day.

We had lunch at one of the campus cafes (not the undergraduate cafeteria) and enjoyed traditional food. They have an interesting system where you tell one person what you want, you pay and they write out a ticket. You take this ticket to the server where they produce your order.

As we were leaving we saw Augur Buzzards on trees near the cultivated areas

Not only was Ayu an excellent driver, he also was a very good spotter and was becoming interested in birdwatching. That meant he knew that "bird" means that we've seen something and please pull over. Furthermore he could pull over to a good location to not only see the bird but also try and get some photos. There were even plenty of birds on the power/telegraph lines and was driving along that we saw the Northern Carmine Bee Eater, Lilac Breasted Roller, Long Crested Eagle and Eastern Chanting Goshawk.



Lunch at the campus cafe
Ayu, Mekonnen, Alazar



Long Crested Eagle



Northern Carmine Bee Eater

Later that afternoon after checking into my hotel we went for a walk in the sort of place that a birdwatcher would never visit however given the time constraints we went and had a look. It was one of those lake front areas which is full of bars, souvenir sellers, loud music, empty drink containers, etc, etc. However the richness of Lake Awasa meant that there was plenty of birdlife even here.



African Jacana



Woodland Kingfisher

I think some of the locals were rather surprised to see people with binoculars looking into the bushes at the water's edge. One or two of the more curious actually asked us what we were doing. Alazar liked to explain further, as he said birdwatching isn't really common in Ethiopia and when someone is curious they may well become more interested.



Hadada Ibis with Spur Winged Plover & Common Moorhen



Adolescent African Fish Eagle

Needless to say we did see quite a few birds including Woodland Kingfisher, African Jacana, African Fish Eagle (again), Little Grebe, Squacco Heron, Black Crake and Hottentot Teal.

We could also see the Malachite Kingfisher again and I was rewarded being able to take a photograph.

After an early walk the next morning where I saw a Little Bittern along with birds that were becoming more familiar. We then started to drive back to Addis and had a few scheduled stops at cultural landmarks. The highlight was when we went to Adadi Mariam, a rock hewn church which was built by King Lalibela. There was a service in progress when we arrived and while waiting in the church grounds we managed to see African Dusky Flycatcher, Little Bee Eater, Village Indigo Bird, Swainsons Sparrow and my favourite Red-Cheeked Cordon-Bleu. The latter are very busy little birds that travel in flocks and it is very relaxing just to watch them getting on with their lives.



Malachite Kingfisher



Red-Cheeked Cordon-Bleu

There was quite a bit of shrubbery in the church grounds, which was perfect for the little birds to hide in. Even better they had placed a bird bath next to a decent sized bush which certainly encouraged birds to come out and play. It was very enjoyable just sit there and watch them while waiting for the service to end.

Admittedly even a transport cafe, where we stopped for a cup of tea, could also yield birds including Common Bulbul and unfortunately one that I didn't see but Alazar did, the Fire Finch.



Grey Heron feeding on stubble



White Storks

Birds List – in Order Seen

Wattled Ibis	White Bellied Go-Away-Bird
Cattle Egret	Tawny Eagle
Egyptian Goose	Great Cormorant
Sacred Ibis	Hooded Vulture
Black Kite	Greater Blue Eared Starling
Pied Crow	African Grey Hornbill
Little Grebe	Willow Warbler
Blue Breasted Bee Eater	Little Bee Eater
Marabou Stork	Speckled Mousebird
Western Marsh Harrier	Laughing Dove
Lesser Jacana	Thick Billed Raven
African Jacana	African Paradise Flycatcher
Hamerkop	Red Shouldered Cuckoo Shrike
Grey Heron	Red Eyed Dove
Spur Winged Plover	Silvery Cheeked Hornbill
Grey Headed Gull	Mountain Thrush
Yellow Wagtail	Abyssinian Oriole
Ruff	Yellow Fronted Parrot
Spotted Redshank	Narina Trogon
African Fish Eagle	Great Sparrow Hawk
African Mourning Dove	Green Twinspot
Malachite Kingfisher	Ethiopian Boubou
Pygmy Kingfisher	Common Bulbul
Pied Kingfisher	Red Headed Weaver
Long Tailed Cormorant	Nubian Woodpecker
Baglafecht Weaver	Abyssinian Ground Thrush
Hadada Ibis	Brown Throated Wattle Eye
White Headed Buffalo Weaver	White Cheeked Turaco
Eurasian Hoopoe	Ruppell's Robin Chat
Red Billed Buffalo Weaver	Dusky Turtle Dove
Ethiopian Swallow	Augur Buzzard
Superb Starling	Northern Carmine Bee Eater
Black Winged Stilt	Lilac Breasted Roller
Lesser Flamingo	Long Crested Eagle
Greater Flamingo	Woodland Kingfisher
Pied Avocet	Squacco Heron
Little Stint	Common Moorhen
Grey Backed Fiscal	Black Crake
White Backed Vulture	Hottentot Teal
Tacazze Sunbird	Little Egret
Isabelline Wheatear	Little Bittern
Ostrich	Lesser Kestrel
Fork Tailed Drongo	White Browed Coucal
Crowned Lapwing	Eastern Chanting Goshawk
Common Greenshank	White Stork
White Browed Sparrow Weaver	Red-Cheeked Cordon-Bleu
Ring Necked Dove	African Dusky Flycatcher
Northern Crombec	Village Indigobird
Namaqua Dove	Swainsons Sparrow
Black Billed Wood Hoopoe	Brown Rumped Seedeater
Total 100 ⁴	

Plus those seen earlier White-Crowned Wheatear, Yellow Billed Kite & Little Swift

⁴ I didn't cheat – they came out exactly at a round 100