

Ethiopia 29th November - 16 December 2014



Gelada

Tim Bourne

Background: Five friends and I decided it was time to visit Ethiopia as we had already visited six other African countries south of the Sahara. Five of us flew from the UK and one from Australia, an ex-pat now living in Sydney. This trip was mainly organised for birding, particularly for the endemics and near endemics of the region. But as a couple of us were also very keen to see as many mammals as possible I tried to factor in sites and mammal watching opportunities wherever and whenever possible. But under such circumstances compromises were inevitably.

We used the services of Merid Gabremichael as our guide and had two vehicles with drivers. Merid, as the guide, always sat in the lead car. For fairness we rotated daily between vehicles so everyone got a go in the lead vehicle.

Merid is a very good bird guide and co-wrote *Where to watch birds in Ethiopia (along with Claire Spottiswoode & Julian Francis)*. We used this book extensively not only for the bird sites but also for the mammal information contained in the book. Sites mentioned in this report are from this book. Other books used were *The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals - Jonathan Kingdon*, and *Birds of the Horn of Africa - Redman, Stevenson & Fanshawe*. We also used bird trip reports from various sites and mammal trip reports off mammalwatching.com (of course!).

Our accommodation for the most part was basic (an understatement on a couple of occasions!) but adequate. As was the food - with two of us being vegetarians our lunch and evening meals mainly consisted of pasta with a tomato sauce or rice with vegetables. But in the main the food was just fine.

We noted, as others have, the ongoing problem of habitat degradation due to massive overgrazing by domestic livestock in the National Parks along with cutting of trees for firewood. We saw two dogs, not sure if they were feral or farm dogs, on the Sanetti Plateau (Bale Mountain National Park) in an area that had Ethiopian Wolves. I believe this potential problem is addressed at times with feral dogs being shot.

Problems/mishaps: For a couple of days it was very difficult to get diesel for the vehicles and at times got a little worrying but the dispute with the petrol stations was soon over and we weren't held up for more than a couple of

hours on one day. Apparently the petrol stations had refused to sell diesel because the price had dropped too much!

Unfortunately we didn't do as much spotlighting as a dedicated mammal trip would have been able to do but we did do some where possible. Yabello in the south of the country is a good area for spotlighting and with no restrictions as is the case in the National Parks to some extent. A good area to try is the acacia savannah, scrub and woodland towards Soda - the Soda plains. The area can be reached by taking the road south out of Yabello (if you continue south along this road you come to the northern Kenyan border) at around 75K south of Yabello take the dirt road east towards the town of Soda. The dirt road eventually goes to Negele. We were planning to go spotlighting on our last evening in this area but unfortunately one of our vehicles hit and killed a cow that afternoon. The vehicle was badly damaged but drivable and fortunately no one in the vehicle was hurt. However, the driver and vehicle was then tied up in bureaucracy and red tape for a day and a half and didn't rejoin us until the morning we were departing Lake Awassa for Wondo Genet. Merid did arrange another vehicle and so we weren't held up and was able to continue our trip from Yabello to Lake Awassa. But it did mean on the day of the accident we couldn't get to the Soda Plains that evening, we could only go a little way south of Yabello by using one vehicle to shuttle the six of us in three's out and back.

Team: Tim Bourne, Mike Clarke, Tim Jones (ex-pat), Vince Kinsler, John Pilgrim and me John Wright. Unfortunately MC, TJ & VK could only do thirteen days due to work/family commitments.

Total number of mammals seen: 42

Total number of birds seen: 470

Itinerary:

Day 1 29th Nov. Arrive Addis Ababa 06:45 from London then onto Debre Libanos. O/N Ghion Hotel, Addis Ababa.

Day 2 30th Nov. Addis Ababa to Awash National Park. O/N Awash Falls Lodge.

Day 3 1st Dec. Awash National Park: Ilala Sala Plains. O/N Awash Falls Lodge.

Day 4 2nd Dec. Awash National Park to Ali Dege Plains Wildlife Reserve then onto Lake Langano. O/N Langano Wabe Shebelle Hotel.

Day 5 3rd Dec. Lake Langano to Goba via Dinsho/Gaysay Valley, Bale Mountains National Park. O/N Goba Wabe Shebelle Hotel.

Day 6 4th Dec. Bale Mountains National Park: Morning Sanetti Plateaux, then Dinsho/Gaysay Valley in the afternoon. O/N Goba Wabe Shebelle Hotel.

Day 7 5th Dec. Goba to Negele via Sanetti Plateaux & Harena Forest (Bale Mountains N.P.). O/N Noc Hotel, Negele.

Day 8 6th Dec. Negele area. O/N Noc Hotel.

Day 9 7th Dec. Negele to Yabello. O/N Yabello Motel.

Day 10 8th Dec. Yabello area. O/N Yabello Motel.

Day 11 9th Dec. Yabello to Lake Awassa. O/N United Africa Hotel.

Day 12 10th Dec. Lake Awassa to Senkelle Hartebeest Sanctuary and then onto Wondo Genet. O/N Wondo Resort.

Day 13 11th Dec. Back to Addis Ababa - end of the first leg of the tour three participants (MC, TJ & VK) depart. O/N Ghion Hotel.

Day 14 12th Dec. Addis Ababa to Debre Libanos. O/N Ethio-German Park Hotel.

Day 15 13th Dec. Debre Libanos via Jemma Valley and Gemessa Gedel then Debre Birhane. O/N Debre Birhane.

Day 16 14th Dec. Debre Birhane to Melka Gebdu and Ankobar area. O/N Debre Birhane.

Day 17 15th Dec. A few hours around Debre Birhane grassland and then back to Addis Ababa. O/N Ghion Hotel.

Day 18 16th Dec. Depart Addis Ababa - 11:45 flight back to London.

Annotated List of Mammals Recorded

Names and taxonomical order of the mammals mainly follows that of “The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals”.

Baboons & Monkeys Cercopithecidae

Olive Baboon *Papio anubis*

Troops were seen at Debre Libanos; Awash National Park; en route between Lake Langano and Bale National Park and the Negele area.



Olive Baboon

Tim Bourne

Sacred (Hamadryas) Baboon *Papio hamadryas*

A troop of around 40 were on the plains (Sobober Plains I think) adjacent to Mount Fantale and a large troop seen on the roadside near the Awash River en route to the Ali Dege Plains Wildlife Reserve.

Gelada *Theropithecus gelada*

A troop at Debre libanos in the grounds of the Ethio-German Hotel/Portuguese Bridge area, plus small troops in the Gemma Valley and Gemessa Gedel.



Gelada

Vince Kinsler

Guereza Colobus *Colobus guereza*

Good numbers seen at Haremma Forest; Lake Awassa and Wondo Genet.





Guereza Colobus

both photos Vince Kinsler

Grivet Monkey *Cercopithecus aethiops*

Seen at Awash National Park; Lake Awassa; Wondo Genet; Gemma Valley and on the roadside just south of Addis Ababa.



Grivet Monkey

John Wright

Galagos/Bushbabies Galagonidae

Somali Galago *Galago gallarum*

One caught in the headlights as it literally bounced across the road in front of the vehicle, early evening (19:00) not too far from Negele.

Bats Pteropodidae

Yellow-winged Bat *Lavia frons*

One disturbed from Acacia scrub during the day and what was possibly this species seen at night at Lake Awassa.

Ethiopian Woolly Bat *Kerivoula eriophora*

What was believed to be this species emerging from the volcanic crevices at the base of Mount Fantale.

Hares & Rabbits Leporidae

Cape Hare *Lepus capensis habessinicus*

One Negele area (Liben grasslands) and one Debre Libanos grasslands.

Scrub Hare *Lepus saxatilis*

Three on the plain (Sobober?) adjacent to Mount Fantale; One Ali Dege plains (Wildlife Reserve) and one en route Negele - Yabello and one south of Addis Ababa.

Starck's Hare *Lepus starcki*

One on the Sanetti Plateau (Bale Mountains N.P.) and at least seven seen in the early hours en route to Melka Gebdu from Debre Birhane.

Squirrels Sciuridae

Unstriped Ground Squirrel *Xerus rutilus*

Up to five seen per day whilst in the Negele and Yabello areas.

Gambian Sun Squirrel *Heliosciurus gambianus*

At least four seen in the grounds of the Agricultural College at Wondo Genet.

Rats & Mice Cricetidae & Muridae

Giant Root Rat *Tachyoryctes macrocephalus*

A few of these bizarre looking rodents seen whilst up on the Sanetti Plateau (Bale Mountains N.P.) usually just their head and shoulders poking out of their hole but occasionally the full animal seen.



Giant Root Rat

Vince Kinsler

Blick's Grass Rat *Arvicanthus blicki*

Common on the Sanetti Plateau (Bale Mountains N.P.).

Black-clawed Brush-furred Rat *Lophuromys melanonyx*

Eventually pinned down well enough to be able to identify one or two, on the Sanetti Plateau (Bale Mountain N.P.).

Typical Vlei Rat *Otomys typus*

Two seen around their burrows on grassland just north of Debre Birhane.

Dogs & Allies Canidae

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*

Four on the Ali Dege Plains (two singles and a pair); three (a single and a pair) in the Gaysay Valley Grasslands (Bale Mountains N.P.) and a single in the Senkelle Hartebeest Sanctuary.

Black-backed Jackal *Canis mesomelas*

One seen late afternoon in scrub about 10K south of Yabello.

Ethiopian Wolf *Canis simensis*

You really couldn't go to Ethiopia and not see this superb animal it just wouldn't be right! As I'm sure you are all aware it is the world's rarest canine and Africa's most endangered carnivore, with a population estimated at around 500 animals. We had excellent views of six adults the first morning on the Sanetti Plateau (Bale Mountains N.P.). On the second morning as we traversed the Sanetti Plateau en route to Negele we saw eleven wolves. This included a very memorable sighting when we leapt out of the vehicles to watch four adults sitting together it was a joy to see that there was also four cubs with them. The cubs were still chocolate brown so I guess around six weeks old. The four adults eventually wandered off to hunt and left the cubs playing in the early morning sunshine - absolutely fabulous. Unfortunately, they weren't close enough to photograph.



Ethiopian Wolf

Tim Bourne



Ethiopian Wolf

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Ethiopian Wolf

Vince Kinsler



Ethiopian Wolf in Sanetti Plateau habitat

John Wright

Mongoosees Herpestriidae

Egyptian Mongoose *Herpestes ichneumon*

Two together in the Gaysay Valley Grasslands (Bale National Park) and another two together in scrub and farmland habitat about 10K from Negele.

Slender Mongoose *Herpestes sanguinea*

Two singles crossed the road west of Harennna Forest whilst we were en route to Negele from Goba.

White-tailed Mongoose *Ichneumia albicauda*

One in the grounds of the Yabello Motel around 21:00 one evening.

Hyaenas Hyaenidae

Spotted Hyena *Crocuta crocuta*

One crossed the road in front of the lead vehicle as we entered Awash National Park. We spent a super late afternoon/early evening at the base of Mount Fantale watching seven Hyenas - four well grown cubs and three adults. One crossed in front of our vehicle in the early hours not far from Negele whilst en route to Yabello.



Spotted Hyena

Tim Bourne



Spotted Hyena

Vince Kinsler

Genets & Civets Viverridae

Common Genet *Genetta genetta*

One ran across the road between our two vehicles as we drove through Negele (actually in the town) around 21:30 in the evening. The next night we found a freshly killed individual (hit by a car) in almost the same place to where the individual crossed the road the night before - very sad. One seen whilst spotlighting in scrubland about 10K south of Yabello.

Cats Felidae

Serval *Felis serval*

Bale Mountains N.P: One seen well, albeit briefly and a bit distant, in the Gaysay Valley Grasslands at 16:20 and another seen by the side of the road very briefly about 5K west of where we saw the first one.

Hyraxes Hyracoidea

Ethiopian Rock Hyrax *Procavia habessinica*

Small numbers seen at various locations - Beseka Lake; Fantale Mountain; Debre Libanos; Gemessa Gedel.

Bush (yellow-spotted) Hyrax *Heterohyrax brucei*

One in bank side vegetation along River Lomi, Gemma Valley area.

Pigs Suidae

Common Warthog *Phacochoerus africanus*

Seen at Awash National Park; Ali Dege Plains and the Gaysay Valley Grasslands (Bale Mountains N.P.) where amazingly common.



Warthog

John Wright

Antelope & Allies Bovidae

Menelik's Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus meneliki*

Seen well, but in small numbers, in the Gaysay Valley Grasslands (Bale Mountains N.P.) and Dinsho Camp grounds (Bale Mountains N.P. HQ).

Mountain Nyala *Tragelaphus buxtoni*

Good numbers and excellent views of this super looking antelope in the Gaysay Valley Grasslands (Bale Mountains N.P.) and Dinsho Camp grounds (Bale Mountains N.P. HQ).



Mountain Nyala

Vince Kinsler above Tim Bourne below



Lesser Kudu *Tragelaphus imberbis*

Three seen in Awash National Park and one just south of Yabello.

Bush Duiker *Sylvicapra grimmia*

Two seen in bush behind the Goba Wabe Shebelle Hotel; two seen as we started to climb up to the Sanetti Plateau and one in the Gaysay Valley Grasslands, (Bale Mountains N.P.).

Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus*

Two seen on a cliff top at Gemessa Gedel.

Salt's Dik-dik *Madoqua saltiana* or **Harar Dik-dik** *Madoqua hararensis* if you follow the recent split.

Around fifteen seen in Awash National Park and two seen in the Ali Dege Plains.

Günther's Dik-dik *Madoqua guentheri*

In total we saw about 76 of these fabulous little antelopes. We saw some around the Yabello area but by a long way the majority were seen en route from Negele to Yabello when we counted 69 in scrub and acacia woodland alongside the dirt road.

Bohor Reedbuck *Redunca redunca*

Good numbers seen in the Gaysay Valley Grasslands (Bale Mountains N.P.) and in the grounds of the Dinsho Camp (Bale Mountain N.P. HQ).



Bohor Reedbuck

Tim Bourne

Grant's Gazelle *Gazella granti*

At least twenty seen in acacia savannah in the Soda Plains area, south of Yabello.

Soemmerring's Gazelle *Gazella soemmerringi*

Seen well and in good numbers in Awash National Park and the Ali Dege Plains.

Gerenuk *Litocranius walleri*

Four seen in the Ali Dege Plains and six in acacia savannah, Soda Plains, south of Yabello.

Swaynes Hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus swaynei*

Two or three herds numbering a total of around 200 animals were encountered in the Senkelle Sanctuary.



Swaynes Hartebeest

Tim Bourne



Swaynes Hartebeest

Tim Bourne

Beisa Oryx *Oryx beisa*

Seen well and in good numbers in Awash National Park and the Ali Dege Plains.

End piece: The following two photographs of a domestic cat or a domestic cat x wildcat hybrid or maybe just a domestic cat with some wildcat blood in its veins following a liaison a generation or two ago! I took these pictures in the hotel grounds alongside Lake Awassa. See also my mammal watching forum posting for February 9th 2015 - *African Wildcat?* Depending on the views you get you could have a dilemma whether to tick it or not to tick it if a cat like this one is seen at night whilst spotlighting out in the bush.



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