

Djibouti, 26 Dec 2014 – 2 Jan 2015

Critically endangered endemic Djibouti Francolin, Whaleshark, Crab Plover and range-restricted Arabian Golden & Somali Sparrow, Somali Starling and Somali Bulbul (along with Arabian Warbler, Black Bush Robin, Speke's Pectinator, Somali Klipspringer, Northern Gerenuk, Pelzeln's and Soemmerring's Gazelles). Easily done in a 4-5 day extension before or after an Ethiopia trip.



Male Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchlorus*, Djibouti City (WO, 26 Dec 2014)

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Introduction

Preparing for a long overdue trip to Ethiopia, I learned from the Lonely Planet guide that Djibouti offered good opportunities for Whaleshark viewing. When I subsequently learned Djibouti also held a critically endangered endemic (Djibouti Francolin) and the country is one of the best places to see the enigmatic Arabian Golden Sparrow, it was an easy decision to visit Djibouti prior to the Ethiopia trip. Two friends joined me, and it was decided we'd spend a week in Djibouti to see what we could find, and fly to Addis Abeba thereafter.

Participants

Remco Hofland (RH), Wil van den Hoven (WH) and Wesley Overman (WO) from the Netherlands.

Trip totals

We saw 109 birds, among which the only endemic (Djibouti Francolin) and of which 11 can be considered range-restricted. Forty of these 109 (mostly coastal waders) we did not see in the three following weeks we spent in Ethiopia. The 109 includes probable Pied Wheatear (photographic evidence) but excludes probable Eastern Subalpine Warbler (no photos). None of our Djibouti birds were heard-only (although I believe I heard a Trumpeter Finch once, in a wadi just S of Djibouti City).

High- and lowlights

Of course, finally seeing Djibouti Francolin after c 12 hours of hiking through Foret du Day was a highlight, even though the birds were scoped at some distance.

We had great views of Arabian Golden Sparrow, Somali Sparrow and Crab Plover within Djibouti City, and enjoyed multiple great sightings of Arabian Warbler, Menetries Warbler, Black Bush Robin, Somali Starling, Bonelli's Eagle and Egyptian Vulture (both common here), 3 Hoopoe Larks etc. We also had great views of a Persian Shearwater about 50m from our speedboat: it was bathing and preening for c 1 minute before it took off.

Our main reason to visit the country (to snorkel alongside Whalesharks) was somewhat of a anti-climax for me (RH) since my mask was too small and I only saw it briefly, swimming away. WH and WO had much better views though. Other non-avian highlights occurred in the form of (very) frequent encounters with Pelzeln's (Dorcas) Gazelles and a few Soemmerring's Gazelles, 4 great (Northern) Gerenuk feeding on their hindlegs, the odd and range-restricted rodent Speke's Pectinator, a spectacular aberrant mushroom (Sandy Stiltball *Battarrea phalloides*, a rare species and a first for Djibouti), a nice small gecko (probably Middle Eastern Rock Gecko *Pristurus flavipunctatus*) and a number of beautiful butterflies and a hoverfly.



Departure gate at Istanbul airport (RH, 25 Dec 2014)



Fish shop in Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014)

Undescribed subspecies of Desert Lark?

I was intrigued by my sighting of four Desert Larks with long and slender bills, at a spring c 2 km south of Day village. They resembled the *assabensis* ssp described and depicted in the Horn of Africa field guide, but showed extraordinarily long and thin bills compared to any other Desert Larks I've seen (in Morocco, Syria, Israel, elsewhere in Djibouti). This feature struck me immediately in the field, which it did not when, in other parts of Djibouti, we saw *assabensis* Desert Larks. Check these pix (more videostills in the Triplist):





Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* (*ssp nov?*), Foret du Day (RH, 30 Dec 2014)

I noticed the same bill shape on the other three individuals but only managed pix and video of one individual. Whether these Desert Larks represent an undescribed subspecies, are aberrantly billed or are just something entirely new, I don't know!

First Cyprus Wheatears for Djibouti?

We saw and photographed several (c 5) birds which I think are Cyprus Wheatear (a first for Djibouti). However, the bird below (which I initially thought was Cyprus) I now believe to be Pied (on account of the 'long' tail and primary projection; aided by Wesley's much better photos).

While in Ethiopia we saw many more or less similar birds and I realise I perhaps hadn't had enough experience with winter-plumaged Pied Wheatear (a bird wintering widely in Ethiopia). Intriguing however is the fact that in Djibouti we only encountered 'male type' birds, a fact shared with encounters in the Ethiopian highlands, whereas in the warmer, lowland parts of (mainly southern) Ethiopia we also frequently saw 'female type' birds (grey & nondescript, therefore clearly Pied Wheatears since female Cyprus Wheatear looks very different, resembling 'male type' Pied Wheatear). All birds I think were Cyprus Wheatear had the peachy chest the photos on p. 6 and the videostills on p. 38 show.



Probable first-summer male Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, just south of Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014)



Probable first-summer male Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, just south of Djibouti City (WO, 26 Dec 2014). Same bird as previous page.



Probable Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*, southeast of Ali Sabieh (RH, 1 Jan 2015)

Birds not seen

No dips as such, since we knew nothing about the possibilities to see more. Apparently, Djibouti also holds a small population of Sombre Rock Chat, a highly localised rare species once thought endemic to neighbouring Ethiopia (which we were to visit next, and where we in fact saw it with difficulty). Toha Sunbird, an undescribed species, was seen in 1985 but not since (from the depiction in Birds of the Horn of Africa it resembles a female sunbird with pollen on the forehead). Arabian Bustard and Double-banded Plover are other possibilities, in areas that were too distant for us to visit.

Top-5 birds

1. Arabian Golden Sparrow
2. Djibouti Francolin
3. Crab Plover
4. Persian Shearwater
5. Somali Sparrow

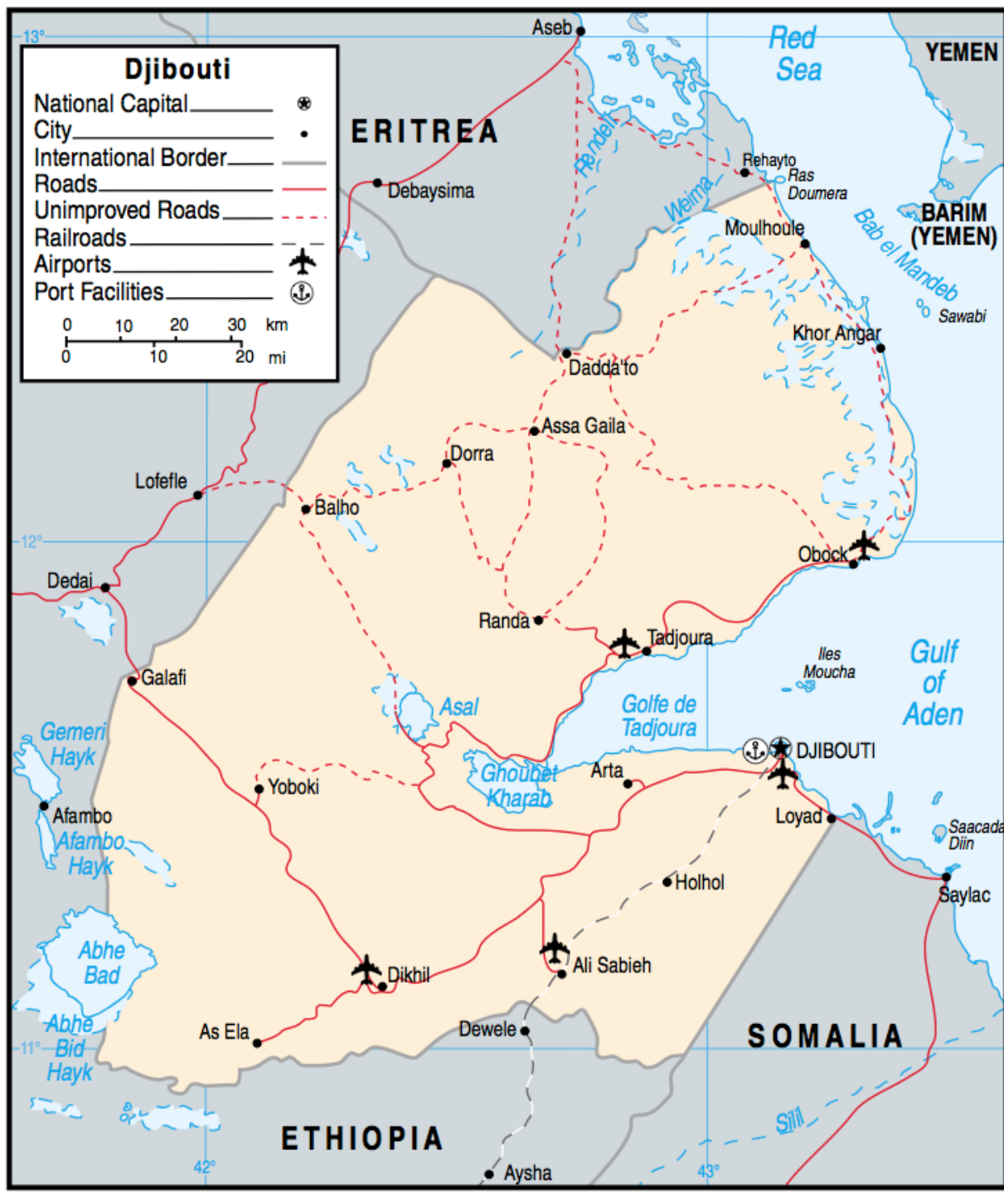
Top-5 mammals

1. (Somali) Klipspringer
2. Speke's Pectinator
3. (Northern) Gerenuk
4. Soemmerring's Gazelle
5. Pelzeln's (Dorcas) Gazelle

Guides

We did this trip without a guide and everything worked out fine, with little time wasted on on-site arrangements (with the exception of the first car we rented, see Day-to-day, Tue 30 Dec 2014). Prior to the trip I contacted Djibouti's (only?) resident bird guide, mister Houssein A. Rayaleh [Association Djibouti Nature; www.djiboutinature.org; naturedjibouti@gmail.com; Ph +253 77 833 768] but he emailed he'd be out of the country during our visit. He did however provide some general information on where to find specific birds. During the tour of Ethiopia, after the Djibouti extension, I learned that our excellent Ethiopian guide Merid Gabremichael [Birding Abyssinia; finfoottours@yahoo.com] also guides Djibouti (and Somaliland, another nearby destination with some great endemics).

Upon arrival at Campement Touristique de **Forêt du Day** (unannounced) we were given a roundavel (wooden hut with stretcher) to sleep in and were told someone would guide us into the forest to look for **Djibouti Francolin**. We were joined by two different men on two dates: the first (a boy) apparently knew something about the francolins but was not as experienced as the second, with whom we heard several birds, some close to the trail, until we eventually saw some. We did not agree on a price beforehand, instead when settling the bill we were asked to think of an appropriate price for the guiding ourselves. The c € 30 we gave each guide was appreciated.



Transportation Network

Roadmap of Djibouti, courtesy of University of Texas Libraries (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/djibouti.html>).

The location of Foret du Day is more or less halfway between Randa and the Ghoubet Kharab; the turn-off towards Day village is probably more or less halfway between Ghoubet Kharab and Tadjoura.

Whaleshark viewing

Several companies offer trips to go see and/or snorkel with whalesharks. Most leave the Pier de Peche in Djibouti City around 8.30 am and take an hour or more to reach the site. Basically, one goes north along the beach to the sea in front of the Arta military camp, where the whalesharks are known to feed close to shore, in shallow waters. The ones here are juveniles, up until 16 years old, 3-7m long and most are females. The current and wind push their preferred food, plankton,

close to shore and so they sometimes surface-feed here, giving excellent views even when staying in the boat.

We chose to do a tour with Dolphin Excursions, a dive club based in Djibouti City, run by Americans Dan & Sarah (excursions@dolphinservices.com), because they are ecologically aware and try not to disturb the animals too much. Most other tourists came with locals; it is probably easy to arrange a trip with them at the fishing harbour. Normally, Dolphin does regular trips on Sat and Sun, with a large sailing ship, taking from 7.30 am until ca 5.30 pm. This however, involves a 3-hr boatride to the site and 3-hr return. One typically moors the ship at the (excellent!) reef site and takes small boats to the whalesharks; in between people can snorkel and admire the many corals and fish. We however were with 5 (us 3 and a couple of expats from Addis) and so went with a much faster, and smaller, speedboat, only taking 45 mins to reach the site. Dolphin Excursions normally charges 110 US\$ for the trip, lunch and water included; however, due to the fact we were with a small boat, we only paid 100 US\$.



Explaining Whaleshark rules, Arta (RH, 27 Dec 2014)

We were unlucky, in that we only saw one individual, swimming away to the deep within minutes. One can see up to 20 or more individuals here, and on occasions one can snorkel alongside the gentle giants for 45 mins. However, there appear to be less individuals in recent years, which may have something to do with the increased number of visitors/boats looking for them. If you really want to see them well, and undisturbed, it might be a good idea to charter a boat on a weekday, since Fri, Sat-Sun and local holidays are the most crowded.

Literature

We took the following **books**:

***Birds of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somaliland and Socotra**, 2011, by Nigel Redman, John Fawnshawe and Terry Stevenson; simply indispensable;

***The dragonflies and damselflies of Eastern Africa: Handbook for all Odonata from Sudan to Zimbabwe**, Nov 2014, by KD B Dijkstra and Viola Clausnitzer; very informative and full of good colour photographs;

***Lonely Planet guide to Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somaliland**, June 2013;

and furthermore a print of possible **mammals and their distribution** prepared by WO from maps of IUCN and a selection of plates of Handbook of the Mammals of the World & The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals (the latter we didn't take to Djibouti but one of the Ethiopian participants brought it).

We also took the only **tripreports** we could find on the internet of this rarely-birded country:

***Hugh Buck**, Djibouti Nov 2007 and Febr 2010, both mentioning occasional site names but no descriptions or maps.

Health and safety

We took daily Malarone (anti-malaria prophylaxis) throughout the trip. No health problems were encountered.

Qat (a mild hallucinative) is apparently used widely (as it is in Yemen and Somalia), and sold everywhere, but it didn't interfere with our travel or otherwise (as it apparently can in the aforementioned countries).

Photography

We felt safe wherever we went. We were warned (by Americans) against going into town on New Year's eve but as we weren't in Djibouti City on Dec 31 anyway we did not experience anything weird. We were also warned, and experienced, that especially in Djibouti City people have a hostile attitude to being photographed: whether that was a religious (Muslim), cultural (Somali) or personal thing we could not find out (nor could the person who told us, and she'd been living in Djibouti for years). In general, photographing people (and street scenes full of people) was to be avoided in Djibouti City. However, travelling north in the direction of Tadjoura, photographing people posed no problem after the RN1 / RN 9 intersection, where one apparently enters the Djibouti Afar region. In Ethiopia (where we spent the following three weeks) we noticed the opposite: here, photographing people was not a problem anywhere *except* in Afar regions.

In the Ali Sabieh (SE Djibouti) area, where we went looking for Beira Antelope, people did not mind being photographed, with the notable exception being (the very picturesque) members of traditional dromedary caravans.

At the end of the Pier de Peche (where, at low tide, the mudflats attract a number of waders, most noticeably Crab Plover) guards were insistent we were not allowed to use scopes and cameras (at the start of the c 1 km long Pier de Peche no guards were present). We were also not allowed access to the City's rubbish dump (a place we hoped would hold eagles or storks). In both sites we were told it is possible to obtain some kind of written 'tourist permission' to use cameras at these and similar sensitive sites, at an office in Djibouti City. As we had limited time, we did not try to obtain the document and so can't provide more info. Apparently obtaining it only takes half an hour.

Driving

The continuous stream of trucks between Djibouti City and Ethiopia aside, we did not encounter many private vehicles on the road. The few 4WD / pick-ups we saw adhered to international driving regulations (i.e. driving felt safe). We did not drive at night but I guess it wouldn't be a problem (other than the many gazelles). Djibouti being such a small country I wouldn't see the need to drive at night however.

Language

Apart from local (Djibouti, sounding like Somali, and Afar) languages, French is widely spoken. The only people we encountered that spoke English well were, aside from Americans Dan and Sarah (of Dolphin Excursions), the staff at African Village Hotel, the clerk at Marill rental car agency and the taxi driver that arranged our car-with-driver for us. Even if one does not speak French (well), one could get by using hands and feet.

Visa

A real pain. Visas can be obtained on-site, upon arrival at the (very small) airport of Djibouti City. They cost 90 US\$ (Euros are also accepted), cash only, and it took us 2 hrs to get one. The whole

process is very disorganised, and one person came back after half an hour: he was returned the wrong passport! NOTE that one has to show proof of onward travel (although traveling overland to Ethiopia is possible, and will be allowed I guess), an invitation letter (prerequisite) and probably also a hotel booking. We asked, and got, the invitation letter from Dolphin Excursions (our whaleshark tour organizer), which sufficed.



African Village Hotel and taxi transportation, Djibouti City (RH, 2 Jan 2015)

Money and costs

At the time of writing, € 1 was about 200 Djibouti Francs (hereafter DJF), 1 US\$ about 177 DJF. Upon arrival we found an ATM at the airport but several days later it had gone. (There still was one, that apparently only took Visa credit cards: Master and American Express are not accepted).

We found Djibouti to be rather expensive: taxis (none had taximeters) usually charged around 2,000 DJF (€ 10) for a short ride of less than 5 kms and a night at our Djibouti City hotel, where we stayed most nights, cost 67 US\$. I estimate that in the week in Djibouti, we each spent about € 1,000 (this included the 100 US\$ Whaleshark trip and the fact that a return ticket from Amsterdam to Djibouti is c € 200 more expensive than a return ticket to Addis Abeba). Djibouti sees few independent travelers and probably only attracts either expats, business travelers and a few divers, all of which are known to spend more money than the average budget traveler.



Outskirts of Ali Sabieh (RH, 31 Dec 2014)

Accommodation

In **Djibouti City**, we stayed at the African Village Hotel (prebooked by email for our first two nights; africanvillage08@gmail.com), conveniently located about 700m from the airport (although a local sign states 200m), which was nice but charged 67 US\$ per person per night (breakfast included), and 133 US\$ for a double room (hence we asked for, and got, 3 single rooms). We also ate here every night when in the capital, and although the food was good, it was expensive and portions were small.

At **Foret du Day**, we stayed at the Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (LonelyPlanet mentions the following phone number: 77829774, probably French only), which charged around € 40 each per night in a roundavel with stretchers and mosquito nets; all (good) meals included. Campement Touristique de Foret du Day accepts cash payments only, preferably in DJF.

At the southeastern town of **Ali Sabieh**, there are two hotels: the Hotel Palmeraie we found rather expensive (15,000 DJF / € 75 for a double and 10.000 / € 50 for a single room) and since we were short on cash and they didn't accept credit cards, we stayed at a local hotel, Hotel Assey (5,000 DJF / € 25 per room)(signposted on the left hand side, more or less when entering town from the west: one needs a 4WD to reach it after 300m).



The left hand sign is the one signposted at the main road turn-off (this picture was taken in Day village); right Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (RH, 30 Dec 2014)

Car rental

The big Toyota dealer in Djibouti City, Marill, doubles as a car rental agency. Renting a spacious 4WD, Toyota Hilux pick-up with 4 seats, cost 100 US\$ a day, unlimited mileage and insurance included. We arranged one in 20 mins.

Driving in Djibouti caused no problem, since traffic was limited outside town (aside from the continuous stream of trucks towards Ethiopia) and roads are wide within Djibouti City. **GASOLINE IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN DJIBOUTI CITY**, and perhaps at Tadjoura (we didn't go there).

Road conditions

Djibouti roads are excellent in general. However, in rural areas such as just S of Djibouti City, E and SE of Ali Sabieh and the 21-km ascending track towards Day village (Foret du Day) roads were unsurfaced. They were all easy to navigate with high clearance / 4 WD vehicles though.

Electricity

Throughout Djibouti, the European pin is used, type C. The system operates on 220 volts. In most hotel rooms, only one socket is found (unplug the tv!), so taking a multi socket might come in handy when one has to charge multiple appliances (such as cell phone, camera battery, iPod, iPad etc).

Equipment used

We took:

- **birdsounds** from xeno-canto, on our iPod and smartphones; hardly used;
- **two telescopes** (incl a Swarowski ATX 85mm);
- **1 multi socket**;
- two rechargeable **walkie-talkies**.

DAY-TO-DAY

Thu 25 Dec 2014

Left Amsterdam Schiphol Airport with Turkish Airlines 2.50 pm, arriving Istanbul 7.20 pm (3.5 hr flight, Airbus 320, very good meal). Departed Istanbul at 11.50 pm (5.5 hr flight, B737). Very nice views during the nocturnal flight over west coast of Saudi Arabia, incl Mekka.

Fri 26 Dec 2014

Arrival Djibouti City (smallest international airport I've seen) at dawn, 6.40 am, 2-hr wait for visa, (**Somali Sparrow** on airport doorstep), check-in African Village Hotel, taxi to La Siesta Hotel (**Arabian Golden Sparrow**), thereafter birding in wadis just outside (**Cyprus Wheatear**, **Yellow-breasted Barbet**, **Black Bush Robin**) and in the city (Daurian Shrike, Rufous Scrub Robin), Pier de Peche (**Crab Plover**). Stayed at African Village Hotel, Djibouti City.



Disused railway station and actual site of Arabian Golden Sparrows, Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014)



View to the north and south of Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014)

Sat 27 Dec 2014

Pier de Peche (**Crab Plover**), **Whaleshark** trip (7.30 am – 1.30 pm; Brown Booby, **Persian Shearwater**), birding in wadis surrounding Djibouti City. Arranged a car-with-driver through our taxi driver (the only person we'd encountered so far who spoke reasonable English). Agreed on (the equivalent of) € 120 per day for a 4WD incl driver. Stayed at African Village Hotel, Djibouti City.



Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus*, Gulf of Tadjoura west of Djibouti City (WO, 27 Dec 2014)

Sun 28 Dec 2014

6 am departure from Djibouti City to Foret du Day, stops along the way at several wadis (**Nubian Woodpecker**, **Arabian Warbler**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Black Bush Robin**), at a vantage point with great views into a deep canyon (**White-crowned Wheatear**) and at Lac Assal (no birds but interesting scenery, rocks & quartz), arriving 4 pm at Day village (**Somali Starling**). Initially we wondered about the turn-off to Foret du Day, since the only sign here was that of a hotel (with a black, white and orange sign) but not of Day village, the Campement Touristique or Foret du Day. From the main road towards Tadjoura, the track towards Day village turns left (north) and slowly climbs the mountains (4WD needed), occasionally passing by small villages, but without any trees or anything resembling forest in sight. Even when one, after c 21 km, arrives at the village, only few old (dead) trees are visible just to the right of the road. This turned out to be the edge of a kind of sparsely vegetated juniper (& other) forest that will not last another 10 years I'm afraid, since wood collecting was ongoing and many of the trees were dead. Late afternoon walk on the edge of the village. Staff at our lodging suggested (we thought, as no English was spoken), a 6 am departure the following morning would give a good chance at Djibouti Francolin. Stayed at Campement Touristique de Foret du Day.



Roadside wadi and deep canyon between Djibouti City and Bay of Ghoubet (RH, 28 Dec 2014)



Lac Assal and descend towards Bay of Ghoubet (RH, 28 Dec 2014)

Mon 29 Dec 2014

Departed the camp by car at 6 am, arriving at the 'escarpment near the ruined Governor's Mansion' (mentioned in Hugh Buck's 2010 tourreport) only 10 mins later (it turned out to be only a 15 mins walk). Made a circular walk along the edges of a protruding rock face on the left hand side of the escarpment (dozens of **Somali Starling** flying overhead). Our (young) guide explained that to stand a chance of the francolin, one has to be on-site to start walking no later than 5 am; so none seen or heard. Thereafter, made a longer hike, descending into a small valley to the right hand side of the escarpment, to no avail (**Brown Woodland Warbler**). The guide insisted we would stand a good chance in the afternoon, scanning the rockface below the ruined Governor's Mansion. Lunch at the Campement. In late afternoon, one francolin was heard from just below the Governor's Mansion (**Bonelli's Eagle**). Stayed at Campement Touristique de Foret du Day.



White-crowned Wheatear (WO, 30 Dec 2014)



Access track to Foret du Day (RH, 28 Dec 2014)



Vicinity of Governor's Mansion, Foret du Day (RH, 29 Dec 2014)

Tue 30 Dec 2014

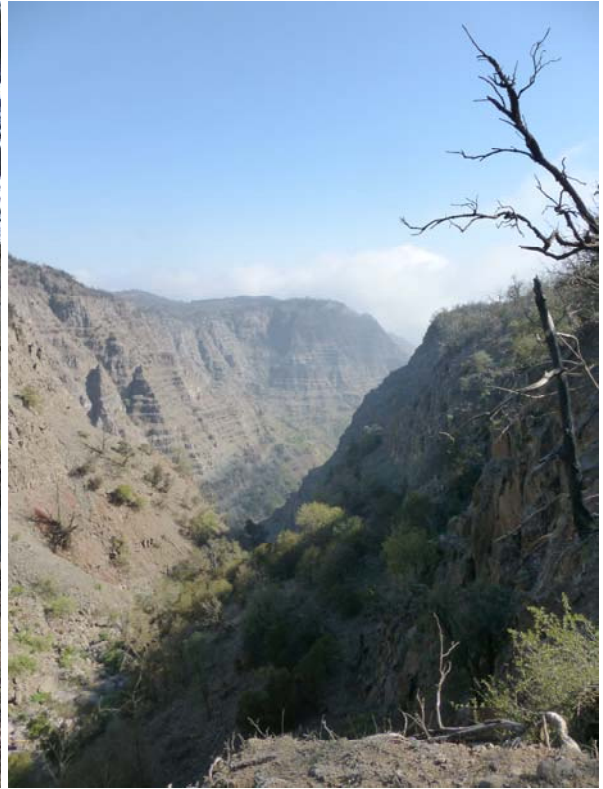
Departed the camp on foot at 4.30 am, with a different (older) guide. He gestured we should not wait and scan from the Governor's Mansion, but rather follow him (in the dark) over the trail to the right hand (south) side of the escarpment, which trail descends into the deep valley. Over the

course of the following hours (c 5.45 – 10.30 am) we heard around 7 different **Djibouti Francolins** calling (flushing 1 from nearby the trail) until WO discovered a site where several francolins would walk towards the bottom of the rock face (undetected) but fly the remainder, steep part, to land in a wadi (perhaps near water). Two individuals were seen here, perched, for c 15 secs (in the scope) before walking out of view. The Campement Touristique left it up to us how much we wanted to pay the local guides (we paid each guide c € 30). Departed Foret du Day after lunch, arriving at African Village Hotel, Djibouti City in early evening.



Morning view from Governor's Mansion, Foret du Day (RH, 29 Dec 2014)

We actually had wanted to stay out of the city longer but the car was not up to standard. Its tyres were highly untrustworthy (we had 5 flat tyres in 48 hours), so negotiating unknown unsurfaced roads in the mountains of SE Djibouti did not sound appealing. Instead, we decided to try and rent a car in Djibouti City the next day. Stayed at African Village Hotel, Djibouti City.



Trail and valley in Forêt du Day (south of Governor's Mansion); along this trail we heard sev Djibouti Francolins on Dec 30th (RH, 29 Dec 2014)



Me overlooking the best valley for Djibouti Francolin, c 2 km south of the Governor's Mansion (30 Dec 2014)



Adult Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata*, Foret du Day access track (WO, 28 Dec 2014)

Wed 31 Dec 2014

Taxi to Marill; arranged a car rental within half an hour (Toyota Hilux high clearance pick-up truck, 100 US\$ per day incl insurance). Got the luggage from the hotel and started towards Ali Sabieh to try and find Beira Antelope (almost endemic to Somalia but with a small population SE of this town in SE Djibouti). Started with great views of roadside **Black-crowned Sparrowlarks** just outside Djibouti City. We were hoping for coursers, bustards, larks or sandgrouse at Petit or Grand Barra deserts along the way, but did see little at the former and the latter turned out to be a gigantic dustbowl with roadworks in such grave state that all (truck) traffic had to drive through dust for c 35 km. Adventurous, but not a bird in sight. Because of the roadworks (and lack of roadsigns) we missed our turn-off, finding ourselves on the correct road an hour later. A late afternoon check of the proper track ESE of Ali Sabieh did give great scenery but no birds of note; we did see an authentic dromedary caravan (people here don't like to be photographed however). Checked in to Hotel Assey, at W end of Ali Sabieh, and had dinner in the centre of town: at the bus station we got a tasty meal of goat meat with onion, water and a cup of tea (€ 1 each). Went to bed at 8.45 pm (no fireworks at night, just a great starry night).



Roadside mosque (RH, 28 Dec 2014)



Afar housing (RH, 28 Dec 2014)



Male Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii*, Foret du Day (WO, 29 Dec 2014)



Track southeast of Ali Sabieh, in prime Beira Antelope habitat (RH, 31 Dec 2014, evening)



Dromedary caravan travelling towards Ali Sabieh in the evening (RH, 31 Dec 2014)



Low hills and wadi southeast of Ali Sabieh, early morning (RH, 1 Jan 2015)

Thu 1 Jan 2015

Very early morning departure to try for Beira Antelope. The track was lined with steepish, not-too-high rocky hills, and while WO and WH climbed to hilltops in order to scan the hinterland for the (notoriously shy) antelopes, I mostly birded the wadis (**Rosy-patched Shrike, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Blue-naped Mousebird, Eastern Orphean Warbler** (apparently a vagrant here?), **Menetries' Warbler, Northern Crombec, Black Bush Robin**) and looked for interesting rocks and quartz.

Around noon we departed the area for the drive back to Djibouti City, not without the occasional stop to scan for bustards & larks. This resulted in seeing a few **Greater Hoopoe Larks** in the Petit Barra Desert, and many **Pelzeln's** and some **Soemmerring's Gazelles** along the road. Upon arrival at African Village Hotel, Djibouti City, at dusk, many weavers were congregating at the car park, to fly off east towards their roost. Among them, WO & WH spotted a male **Chestnut Weaver** (apparently rare here). Stayed at African Village Hotel.



Rufous Scrub Robin *Erythropgyia galactotes* and Black-throated Barbet *Tricholaema melanocephala*, southeast of Ali Sabieh (RH, 1 Jan 2015)



Wadi and shepherdess, southeast of Ali Sabieh (RH, 1 Jan 2015)



Ploughing through Grand Barra desert (RH, 1 Jan 2014)



Wesley with 1 of 3 Greater Hoopoe Larks, Petit Barra desert (RH, 1 Jan 2014)

Fri 2 Jan 2015

Turned in rental car; walked back to hotel, birding along the way (**Daurian Shrike**); relaxed at hotel; 4 pm departure to Addis Abeba, Ethiopia (1 hr direct flight) with Kenyan Airways (booked at home: c € 150). Were collected from the airport (Dusky Turtle Dove, Baglaffeht Weaver, Swainson's Sparrow) and while driving through town we already saw some goodies (Abdim's Stork in flight (WO), Black-winged Lovebird). A walk though the Adot Tina Hotel neighbourhood produced endemics Brown-rumped Seedeater (common), White-collared Pigeon, Ethiopian Cisticola. Stayed at Adot Tina Hotel in central Addis, where our fellow 7 travellers were to arrive past midnight, to start our 3-week Ethiopia birding tour the following morning (see separate tripreport).

Visited sites (in chronological order) and targets

[Crab Plover] means the species can be expected at the site but we didn't record it.

(Surroundings of) La Siesta Hotel, Djibouti City [26 Dec 2014] GPS 11.6064, 43.1499

Targets: Arabian Golden Sparrow, [Crab Plover]

Other: White-eyed, Sooty, Heuglin's & Slender-billed Gull, waders (at low tide)

Hugh Buck's trip report (2010) mentions the surroundings of this hotel for target bird Arabian Golden Sparrow. We did not find it at the (apparently disused) railway opposite the hotel, but in fact walked along the railway embankment away from the sea. After c 200m one arrives at a roundabout, on the opposite end of which is a blue gate that accesses the premises of an old, disused train station (great for photography and train enthusiasts). There were some people around that may live there; some approached us but they were friendly and we could continue. Following the railway tracks for c 200m past the railway station, there was a soccer pitch, a lot of trash and some small tamarisk trees on the left hand side and this (GPS 11.6064, 43.1499) is where we found a flock of **21 Arabian Golden Sparrows** that we could photograph and video well as they landed right in front of us. 3-5 bright-golden males were among them.



La Siesta Hotel, Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014). The actual hotel is one of the tall buildings centre left. At low tide, this part of the sea is dry and full of waders. Now, at high tide, the beach is lined with (mostly Sooty) gulls and a few waders. The photograph was taken from the disused railway embankment: following it left one heads to the disused railway station and the Arabian Golden Sparrows.

Wadis S and SW of Djibouti City [26 Dec 2014]

Birds found: Black-crowned Sparrowlark, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Black Bush Robin; in winter: Pied, Isabelline & Northern Wheatear, Menetries' Warbler

Other: Pelzeln's (Dorcas) Gazelle (mammal), Lanza's Spiny and Sinai Agama (reptiles), Broad Scarlet *Crocothemis erythraea* (dragonfly), *Caralluma acutangula* (plant)

Vicinity of Djibouti City airport / African Village Hotel [26-28 Dec 2014, 1-2 Jan 2015]

Birds found: Somali Sparrow, Chestnut (1m) and c 500 of Rüppell's Weaver (prior to dusk), House Crow, Red-billed Firefinch; in winter: Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Daurian Shrike, Western Yellow Wagtail

Other: Slender Skimmer *Orthetrum sabina* (dragonfly)

Pier de Peche, Djibouti City [26 Dec 2014]

Target: Crab Plover

Other: Pink-backed Pelican, Western Reef Egret, Striated Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, African Sacred Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill (resident ssp or possibly wintering birds), Lesser Flamingo (very distant), Terek Sandpiper, Greater Sand Plover, Caspian & Gull-billed Tern



Pier de Peche, Djibouti City, early morning, with Wesley in foreground, Crab and Grey Plover in centre and two Pink-backed Pelicans perched on the left-hand boat (RH, 27 Dec 2014)

Sea in front of Arta military camp, N of Djibouti City [27 Dec 2014] GPS 11.6083, 42.9356

Targets: Persian Shearwater, Whaleshark

Other: Brown Booby, Osprey, White-eyed & Sooty Gull, Great Crested Tern, great snorkeling [Hawksbill Turtle, stingrays]

NOTE that this site can only be reached by boat, as the road is blocked by military. One cannot enter land here.

Wadis (and stony fields) btw Djibouti City and Day village turn-off [28 + 30 Dec 2014]

Birds found: Egyptian Vulture, Verreaux's Eagle, Nubian Woodpecker, White-crowned & Desert Wheatear, Black Bush Robin, Red-fronted Warbler; in winter: Menetries' & probable Eastern Subalpine Warbler

Other: (Northern) Gerenuk, Pelzeln's (Dorcas) Gazelle

Vantage point with views into deep canyon, along RN9 [28 and 30 Dec 2014]

Wildlife recorded: Verreaux's Eagle, Pale Crag Martin, White-crowned Wheatear, Unstriped Ground Squirrel. Also, locals were selling beautiful crystals & geodes here. GPS 11.446, 42.567



Deep canyon vantage point (RH, 28 Dec 2014)

Foret du Day, c 4 hrs drive north of Djibouti City [28-30 Dec 2014] GPS 11.7593, 42.6593
(<http://djibouti.observation.org/gebied/info/70675>)

Targets: Djibouti Francolin, Somali Starling

Other: Egyptian Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle, [Verreaux's Eagle], Hemprich's Hornbill, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Pale Crag Martin, Fan-tailed Raven; Arabian Warbler (access track, near main road); in winter: Short-toed Eagle, Song Thrush, Common Redstart (common), Blue Rock Thrush, Cyprus, Eastern Black-eared, Isabelline & Northern Wheatear

Mammals: (Somali) Klipspringer, Speke's Pectinator, Pelzeln's (Dorcas) Gazelle, Yellow-spotted & Common Rock Hyrax

Petit Barra Desert, c 3 hr drive S of Djibouti City [31 Dec 2014 – 1 Jan 2015]

Birds found: Greater Hoopoe & Crested Lark

Other: Soemmerring's & Pelzeln's (Dorcas) Gazelle

Ali Sabieh area, c 4 hr drive S of Djibouti City [31 Dec 2014 – 1 Jan 2015]

Target: [Beira Antelope]

Other: Augur Buzzard, Egyptian Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Southern Grey Shrike, Rosy-patched Shrike, Northern Crombec; in winter: Isabelline & Cyprus Wheatear, Eastern Orphean & Menetries' Warbler

Other: Phillip's (Salt's) Dikdik

A look into the future of tripreports

Sharing one's observations directly from the field using Observado / Observation becomes more and more commonplace, with birders now widely using smartphones and apps like iObs and ObsMapp, improving cell phone coverage in remoter areas of the world, and the understanding of the birding community that one does not have to wait for months until a tripreport is finished, but can in fact on a (near-)daily basis, even faster at times, see how friends are doing on their trip. A factor might also be that (travelling) birders are nowadays younger, and thus more accustomed to the new technologies that didn't exist yet when I (and a few of you) started birding / travelling.

In the field, WO recorded most birds and all mammals with an accurate GPS waypoint by using an app (ObsMapp) on his smartphone. Whenever we had WiFi he would upload our sightings onto www.observado.org (or www.observation.org), a free, easy-to-use website that

- publishes all observations at once with accurate site, time and date details;
- has both standard fields (location, date & time, number of individuals, certainty of ID) and a field for extra info should one want to add;
- makes all locations easily available for others, using GoogleEarth maps;
- enables the observer to store photographs and/or sound recordings with one's sightings;
- generates the observer's (life, country, site, trip) lists and
- has the capability to generate multiple exports, such as by species, date-of-year, area etc.

Observado is run by Dutch IT birders that are also behind www.waarneming.nl, a site that is used by almost all Dutch birders (and *anyone* who wishes to record similar data, whether it be plants, fungi, shells, birds, mammals, dragonflies, moths etc) and where possible, admins sift through records and photographs to help identify species.

I used WO's Observado data while writing this trip report. In the near future, it might be possible to export (more or less) complete trip reports (or, while preparing for a trip, create one from multiple trips others made before). The species lists would immediately be put in the right scientific order (with perhaps local subspecies based on location), mentioning all details entered into the app on-site (or back home); such an Observado-generated trip report could automatically add a photograph, posted with the sighting, for example as a thumbnail next to the species.

For now, I wrote this trip report manually (the old-fashioned way, so to speak). A simple query on Observado allows one, however, to see all our data, including photographs. Select the name of the observer (Overman), country (Djibouti) and correct dates (26 Dec 2014 - 2 Jan 2015) to view WO's (this report's) Djibouti records. One can also select just one species group (i.e. Birds, Mammals) or, using the buttons 'Geography' and 'Africa by country' and then clicking on 'Djibouti' on the map displayed, see *all* Djibouti data.

TRIPLISTS

Legend

E = endemic; **NEAE** = Northeast Africa endemic; **EN** = Endangered; **CR** = Critically endangered; **[HO]** = heard only; btw = between; S = south; sev = several; ad = adult; imm = immature; m = male; f = female; c = circa (about); **Arabian Golden Sparrow** = lifer; **V** = video to be published at Surfbirds and/or YouTube.

NOTE that I give rough indications of where we saw stuff, but the most specific site info (using GPS on-site) is found on Observado.

Recorded birds

1. **Persian Shearwater** *Puffinus persicus*: 1 btw Djibouti City & Arta military base (Dec 27) **V**
2. Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster platus*: 1 ad btw Djibouti City and Arta military base
3. Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*: 3 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
4. Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: 3 and 8 flying over Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
5. Striated Heron *Butorides striatus brevipes*: 1 feeding on exposed mud, Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26) **V**
6. Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*: sev Djibouti City seafront; 1 dark-phase ad was very confiding at Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26) **V**
7. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: 1 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
8. Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis*: 3 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
9. African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*: 8 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
10. Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*: 3 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
11. Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*: c 50, distant, Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
12. Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*: 1 btw Ali Sabieh and Djibouti City (Jan 1)
13. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: 1 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26); 3 btw Djibouti City and Arta military base (Dec 27), of which 1, perched on a buoy, approachable to within 10m
14. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* **EN**: c 15 btw Djibouti City and Day village (Dec 27), up to 8 daily Foret du Day, very confiding in Day village; 7 btw Day village and Djibouti City (Dec 30), roosting on electricity pylons west of the road; up to 3 daily Ali Sabieh area (Dec 31-Jan 1) **V**
15. Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: 1 Foret du Day (Dec 30)
16. Augur Buzzard *Buteo augur*: 2 Ali Sabieh area (Dec 31-Jan 1)
17. Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*: 2 btw Djibouti City and Day village (Dec 27), 1 over Day village (Dec 30)



Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus*, Gulf of Tadjoura west of Djibouti City (WO, 27 Dec 2014)



Dark-phase Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*, Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014)

18. Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata*: at least 1 pair daily at Foret du Day (1 ad perched beautifully in late afternoon at Governor's Mansion escarpment; 3 seen Dec 29), with 5 btw Day village and the main road (Dec 30), 1 SE of Ali Sabieh (Dec 31).
19. Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*: 1 pair above deep canyon vantage point (GPS 11.4459, 42.5668; east of the main road btw Djibouti City and Lac Assal, Dec 30)



Adult Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Foret du Day (WO, 30 Dec 2014)



Confiding adult Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus*, outskirts of Day village (WO, 28 Dec 2014)

20. Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus archeri*: 2 Foret du Day (Dec 29), 1 btw main road and Ali Sabieh (Dec 31), 1 SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)

21. **Djibouti Francolin** *Pternistis ochropectus* **E, CR**: 1 HO at escarpment, just below Governor's Mansion, Foret du Day (Dec 29); 7 HO, with 1 heard flying off, and eventually 3 seen in flight and 2 perched, down below in a wadi, Foret du Day (c 10.30 am, Dec 30)



Yes! Wesley Overman and Wil van den Hoven, Foret du Day (RH, 30 Dec 2014)

22. Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*: 3 (2 ad, 1 imm) Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26), with 1 imm at start of Pier de Peche (only 10m away, Dec 27) **V**
23. Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*: 3 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26), 14 La Siesta Hotel beach, Djibouti City (Dec 27)
24. Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*: 9 at partly dry roadside pond, and 2 elsewhere in Djibouti City (Dec 26), 1 at aforementioned pond (Dec 28)
25. Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: 20+ Pier de Peche & La Siesta Hotel beach, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
26. Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: 19 La Siesta Hotel beach, Djibouti City (Dec 27)
27. Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: 1 at partly dry roadside pond, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
28. Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*: 5+ La Siesta Hotel beach, Djibouti City (Dec 27)
29. Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*: 5+ Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
30. Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*: 3 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
31. Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: 2 La Siesta Hotel and 6 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
32. Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: 1 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
33. Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: 2 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
34. Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: 2 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
35. Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*: 2-3 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
36. Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: 16 + 26 La Siesta Hotel and Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)



Immature Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*, Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (27 Dec 2014)

- 37. Sanderling *Calidris alba*: 3 + 250+ La Siesta Hotel, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27)
- 38. Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: 2 La Siesta Hotel, Djibouti City (Dec 27)
- 39. Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: 1 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26), 10+ La Siesta Hotel, Djibouti City (Dec 27)
- 40. Sooty Gull *Ichthyiaetus hemprichii*: 20-30+ La Siesta Hotel, Djibouti City (Dec 26-27) ▼



Sooty Gull *Ichthyiaetus hemprichii*, La Siesta Hotel beach, Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014)

- 41. White-eyed Gull *Ichthyiaetus leucophthalmus*: 1 La Siesta Hotel beach, Djibouti City (Dec 26), 19 on a buoy btw Djibouti City and arta military camp (Dec 27) ▼

42. Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*: 6 ad btw Djibouti City and arta military camp (Dec 27)
43. Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*: 100+ daily on Djibouti City's coasts
44. Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*: 13 La Siesta Hotel beach, Djibouti City (Dec 26)
45. Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*: 3 La Siesta Hotel beach, Djibouti City (Dec 27)
46. Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*: 2 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 27)
47. Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*: 2 La Siesta Hotel and 2 Pier de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 26), 3 er de Peche, Djibouti City (Dec 27)
48. Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*: 15+ on a buoy btw Djibouti City and Arta military camp (Dec 27)



Videostill of White-eyed Gull *Ichthyæetus leucophthalmus*, La Siesta Hotel, Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014)

49. Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*: 10-60 daily in all of Djibouti **V**
50. Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*: quite common in Djibouti City, with 1 daily at Foret du Day
51. Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*: quite common in Djibouti City, with 1 btw the city and Ali Sabieh (Dec 31)
52. Little Swift *Apus affinis*: 3 Djibouti City (Dec 27), 10 Day village (Dec 29)
53. Blue-naped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus abyssinicus*: 5+ African Village Hotel, Djibouti City (Dec 27), 30+ in wadis SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
54. Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: 1 just S of Djibouti City (Dec 26), 1 HO Foret du Day (Dec 30), 2 SE of ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
55. Blue-cheeked Beeeater *Merops persicus*: 4 just S of Djibouti City (Dec 26)
56. Hemprich's Hornbill *Tockus hemprichii*: 3-10 daily in Foret du Day (Dec 28-30)
57. **Yellow-breasted Barbet** *Trachyphonus margaritatus*: 3 just S of Djibouti City (Dec 26), 2 Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (Dec 28-29), 12+ SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1) **V**
58. Black-throated Barbet *Tricholaema m. melanocephala*: 2 SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
59. Nubian Woodpecker *Campethera nubica*: 1m in a roadside wadi W of Djibouti City (Dec 28), 2 (of which 1 HO) SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1) **V**



Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*, Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (RH, 29 Dec 2014)



Female Hemprich's Hornbill *Tockus hemprichii*, Foret du Day (WO, 29 Dec 2014)



Videostill and photograph of Yellow-breasted Barbet *Trachyphonus margaritatus*, Campement Touristique de Foret du Day and southeast of Ali Sabieh (RH, 29 Dec 2014 and 1 Jan 2015)



Male Nubian Woodpecker *Campethera nubica*, west of Djibouti City (WO, 28 Dec 2014)

60. Greater Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes desertorum*: 3 Petit Barra desert btw Ali Sabieh and Djibouti City (Jan 1) (GPS 11.3485, 42.7178)
61. Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti assabensis*: 3 along the RN9 just W of the Day village turn-off (Dec 28), 6 along the track (coming from Foret du Day) just N of the RN9 (Dec 30), 5+ daily in the Ali Sabieh area (Dec 31-Jan 1)
- (..) Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti ssp (nov?)*: 4 at a well just S of Day village, GPS 11.753, 42.623 (Dec 30, RH, **V**). These birds appeared to have more slender, longer bills than other Desert Larks (seen in Djibouti, Israel, Syria, Morocco etc). See pix above and these videostills:
62. Crested Lark *Galerida cristata somaliensis*: 2 just W of Djibouti City (Dec 28), 1 Petit Barra desert (Jan 1) **V**
63. **Black-crowned Sparrowlark** *Eremopterix nigriceps*: 1m flying over a wadi just S of Djibouti City (Dec 26), 4m, 2f along the road just W of Djibouti City (Dec 31) **V**



Videostills of aberrant Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* ssp (nov?), just south of Day village (RH, 30 Dec 2014)



Greater Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes desertorum*, Petit Barra desert between Ali Sabieh and Djibouti City (WO, 1 Jan 2015)



Crested Lark *Galerida cristata somaliensis*, Petit Barra desert (WO, 1 Jan 2015)

64. Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*: 4 at deep canyon vantage point (GPS 11.446, 42.567; east of the main road btw Djibouti City and Lac Assal, Dec 28), 1-3 daily at Foret du Day (Dec 29-30), 1 SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
 65. White Wagtail *Motacilla a. alba*: 5 Djibouti City (Dec 27), 2 outside the city (Dec 28 and 31)



Male Black-crowned Sparrowlark *Eremopterix nigriceps*, on the outskirts of Djibouti City (WO, 31 Dec 2014)

66. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: 1 over Djibouti City (Dec 27), 1m *flava* near Marill rental car agency, Djibouti City (Jan 2)
67. Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: 2 Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (Dec 28), 2 Petit Barra desert btw Ali Sabieh and Djibouti City (Jan 1) (GPS 11.3504, 42.7159)



Male Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flava*, Djibouti City (RH, 2 Jan 2014) and Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, Petit Barra desert (WO, 1 Jan 2015)

68. **Somali Bulbul** *Pycnonotus (b.) somaliensis*: 20 Djibouti City and surrounding wadis (Dec 26, Jan 2), c 4 daily Foret du Day (Dec 28-30), 30+ SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1) **V**
69. Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisisicus*: 2 Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (Dec 28), 13 + 5+ Foret du Day (Dec 29-30)
70. Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*: 1 S of Djibouti City (Dec 27), 1 W of Djibouti City (Dec 28), 5 Foret du Day (Dec 29), 1m SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
71. Rufous Scrub Robin *Erythropygia galactotes*: 1 in dry wadi in Djibouti City (Dec 26), 1 along the track (coming from Foret du Day) just N of the RN9 (Dec 30), 3 SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1), 1 in Djibouti City (Jan 2)
72. Black Bush Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*: 2 in wadi near Djibouti City (Dec 26), 2 in wadi btw Djibouti City and Ali Sabieh (Dec 31), 2 SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
73. Blackstart *Cercomela melanura*: frequently encountered outside Djibouti City (1-6 daily), with 10+ along RN9 in lava fields W of Gulf of Ghoubet (Dec 28)
74. White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*: 7 along RN9 in lava fields W of Gulf of Ghoubet (Dec 28), with 5 seen there on Dec 30



White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*, near Gulf of Ghoubet (WO, 30 Dec 2014)

75. Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe d. deserti*: 1m, 1f btw Djibouti City and Gulf of Goubet (Dec 28, GPS 11.4237, 42.7296), 2m, 1f btw Djibouti City and Ali Sabieh (Dec 31), 1f btw Ali Sabieh and Djibouti City (Jan 1)
76. Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe melanoleuca*: 1m Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (Dec 28)
77. Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: 1f in wadi just S of Djibouti City (Dec 26)
78. Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*: 3 btw Djibouti City and Gulf of Goubet (Dec 28), 1 (Dec 30), 30+ btw Djibouti City and Ali Sabieh (Dec 31), 15+ SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
79. Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*: 1 first-summer male just S of Djibouti City (Dec 26)
80. Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*: 2 around Day village (Dec 28), 3 SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1). Nrs 1-5 for Djibouti. **V**



Videostills of Djibouti's 5th Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*, southeast of Ali Sabieh (RH, 1 Jan 2014)

81. Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: c 10, Foret du Day (Dec 29)
82. Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida elaeica*: c 3 in garden of African Village Hotel (Dec 26, 27, 31, Jan 2) and 7+ in wadis around Djibouti City (Dec 26)
83. Brown Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*: 15+ Foret du Day (Dec 29-30)
84. Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: 2 Foret du Day (Dec 29)
85. Menetries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*: 3+ (1m and 1f seen well) in wadis W of Djibouti City (Dec 28, GPS 11.4298, 42.709), 1f btw Djibouti City and Ali Sabieh (Dec 31), 1 SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
- (..) Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*: 1 probable female west of Djibouti City (Dec 30)
86. Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*: 2 along the track (coming from Foret du Day) just N of the RN9 (Dec 30, GPS 11.6653, 42.5975), 1 btw Ali Sabieh and Djibouti City (Jan 1)
87. Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*: frequently heard and seen in and around Djibouti City
88. Red-fronted Warbler *Urorhipis rufifrons*: 8 btw Djibouti City and Gulf of Goubet (Dec 28, GPS 11.430, 42.708), with 1 past the Day village turn-off; 5+ SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
89. Northern Crombec *Sylvietta brachyura leucopsis*: 5 SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
90. Abyssinian White-eye *Zosterops a. abyssinicus*: 2 Foret du Day (Dec 29-30)
91. Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus*: 1m, 1f in garden of African Village Hotel, Djibouti City (Jan 2) appeared to be this species
92. **Nile Valley Sunbird** *Hedydipna metallica*: 1m btw Djibouti airport and African Village Hotel (Dec 26)
93. Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis aucheri*: 1 just S of Djibouti City (Dec 26), 2 Djibouti City and Gulf of Goubet (Dec 28), 5 btw Djibouti City and Ali Sabieh (Dec 31), 30+ SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1)
94. Daurian Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*: singles in Djibouti City (Dec 26-27, Jan 2)
95. Ethiopian Boubou *Laniarius aethiopicus*: up to 3 seen and 6 heard daily, Foret du Day (Dec 29-30)
96. Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus habessinicus*: 2 along the track (coming from Foret du Day) just N of the RN9 (Dec 30, GPS 11.7107, 42.5984)
97. Rosy-patched Shrike *Rhodophoneus cruentus hilgerti*: 20+ SE of Ali Sabieh (Jan 1) **V**



Male Rosy-patched Shrike *Rhodophoneus cruentus hilgerti*, southeast of Ali Sabieh (RH, 1 Jan 2015)

98. Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis divaricatus*: 2 Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (Dec 28), 4 Foret du Day (Dec 29)
99. House Crow *Corvus splendens*: very common in Djibouti City
100. Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus r. rhipidurus*: frequently seen at Day village (confiding) and over Foret du Day (6-11 daily, Dec 28-30) **V**
101. **Somali Starling** *Onychognathus blythii* **NEAE**: 2 pairs Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (Dec 28), 47 over the Governor's Mansion escarpment in early morning, and a calling female at Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (Dec 29), 5 Foret du Day (Dec 30) **V**



Male Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii*, Foret du Day (WO, 29 Dec 2014)



Female Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii*, Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (WO, 29 Dec 2014)

- 102. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: 1m Djibouti City (WO, WH)
- 103. **Somali Sparrow** *Passer castanopterus* **NEAE**: at least 3m, Djibouti City and African Village Hotel. Individuals seen were not as yellow as depicted in Birds of the Horn of Africa (the bright yellow race *fulgens*), instead 1 was rather clean with a pale yellow wash on cheek and belly, the other being white in those areas. Bright rufous cap and nape, and rufous lesser and median wing coverts clearly visible.
- (..) House x Somali Sparrow *Passer domesticus* x *castanopterus*: the common type of sparrow, encountered in dozens daily in Djibouti City. Usually showing some grey either in the nape or neck (where pure Somali should be rufous) and the rufous of cap/neck and wingcoverts would not meet. **V**



Videostill of probable male hybrid House x Somali Sparrow *Passer domesticus* x *castanopterus*, gathering nesting material at (the expense of) African Village Hotel in Djibouti City (RH, 2 Jan 2015)



Probable hybrid males House x Somali Sparrow *Passer domesticus* x *castanopterus*, at airport Djibouti City (WO, 26 Dec 2014). Wrong for pure Somali Sparrow *P. castanopterus* is the lack of continuous rufous between nape and shoulder on both birds. The top male also shows black scalloping on the breast, diagnostic for male (pure) House Sparrow *P. domesticus*.

104. **Arabian Golden Sparrow** *Passer euchlorus*: 21 (incl several golden males) at the disused railway station nearby La Siesta Hotel, Djibouti City (Dec 26) **V**



Videostill of a pair of Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchlorus*, Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014)

105. **Rüppell's Weaver** *Ploceus galbula*: 30-40 daily in Djibouti City (Dec 26-27, Jan 2), with 500+ pre-roosting in car park of African Village Hotel, Djibouti City (evening of Dec 30); c 15 around Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (Dec 28-30), with sev males there singing, displaying and nestbuilding **V**



Male Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*, Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (RH, 29 Dec 2014)



Male Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*, Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (WO, 29 Dec 2014)

- 106. Chestnut Weaver *Ploceus r. rubiginosus*: 1m amongst c 500 Rüppell's Weavers, prior to dusk, African Village Hotel parking lot (Dec 30)(WO, WH)
- 107. Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala*: 1 pair Djibouti Airport, with sev in dry wadi inside Djibouti City (Dec 26) **V**
- 108. Crimson-rumped Waxbill *Estrilda r. rhodopyga*: 5 Djibouti Airport (Dec 26)
- 109. African Silverbill *Euodice cantans orientalis*: 2 Djibouti Airport (Dec 26)
- (..) **[HO]** Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*: thought I heard the distinctive flight call once, in a wadi just S of Djibouti City (RH, Dec 26)



Videostill of a male Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala*, Djibouti Airport (RH, 26 Dec 2014)

Recorded mammals

1. Spinner Dolphin *Stenella longirostris*: 3 probables, btw Djibouti City and Arta military camp. Very wary and not spinning.
2. Pelzen's (Dorcas) Gazelle *Gazella (dorcas) pelzelni*: a total of 57 seen, just S of Djibouti City, along the main road btw Djibouti City and Day village turn-off and, most frequently, along RN1 in the Petit and Grand Barra (stony) deserts (i.e. GPS 11.193, 42.603) ▼



Male Pelzen's (Dorcas) Gazelle *Gazella (dorcas) pelzelni*, Petit Barra desert northwest of Ali Sabieh (WO, 31 Dec 2014)

3. Soemmerring's Gazelle *Nanger soemmerringii*: family groups of 5 and 6 in close proximity, along RN1 in the Petit Barra desert (GPS 11.355, 42.730) ▼



Male Soemmerring's Gazelle *Nanger soemmerringii*, Petit Barra desert NW of Ali Sabieh (WO, 1 Jan 2015)

4. Phillip's (Salt's) Dik-Dik *Madogella (saltiana) phillipsi*: 2 SE of Ali Sabieh (GPS 11.017, 42.807)(Jan 1)



Phillip's (Salt's) Dik-Dik *Madogella (saltiana) phillipsi*, southeast of Ali Sabieh (WO, 1 Jan 2015)

5. (Northern) Gerenuk *Litocranius (wallei) sclateri*: 1 pair along RN9 S of Ghoubet Bay (GPS 11.431, 42.693) (Dec 28), 1 pair feeding unconcerned and quite nearby, on their hindlegs, in a wadi SE of Ali Sabieh (GPS 11.018, 42.808)(Jan 1) **V**
6. (Somali) Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus somalicus*: 3 along the track to Foret du Day, 1 Foret du Day (Dec 28) **V**
7. Ethiopian Rock Hyrax *Procavia habessinica*: 1 Foret du Day, 2 SE of Ali Sabieh
8. Yellow-spotted Hyrax *Heterohyrax brucei*: 1 Foret du Day (Dec 29-30)
9. Speke's Pectinator *Pectinator spekei*: c 6 in and on stony walls, access track towards Foret du Day (for example, at GPS 11.702, 42.602) **V**
10. Unstriped Ground Squirrel *Xenus rutilus*: 2 at deep canyon vantage point east of the main road btw Djibouti City and Lac Assal (GPS 11.446, 42.567)(WH, WO)
11. Cape Hare *Lepus capensis habessinicus*: 1 Foret du Day (RH)
12. Ship Rat *Rattus rattus*: 1 African Village Hotel, Djibouti City (WO)



A pair of (Somali) Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus somalicus*, Day village access track (WO, 28 Dec 2014)



Male (Northern) Gerenuk *Litocrarius (wallei) sclateri*, southeast of Ali Sabieh (WO, 1 Jan 2015)



Female (Northern) Gerenuk *Litocranius (wallei) sclateri*, southeast of Ali Sabieh (RH, 1 Jan 2015)



Ethiopian Rock Hyrax *Procavia habessinica*, Foret du Day (WO, 29 Dec 2015)



Speke's Pectinator *Pectinator spekei*, along Day village access track (WO, 30 Dec 2014)

Recorded dragonflies (Odonata)

Slender Skimmer *Orthetrum sabina*: 3 African Village Hotel, Djbouti City; 1 in a wadi west of Djibouti City

Broad Scarlet *Crocothemis erythraea*: 1 in a wadi just south of Djibouti City

Globe Skimmer *Pantala flavescens*: 1 caught at night, African Village Hotel, Djbouti City



Broad Scarlet *Crocothemis erythraea*, just south of Djibouti City (WO, 26 Dec 2015)



Slender Skimmer *Orthetrum sabina*, African Village Hotel, Dibouti City (RH, 2 Jan 2015)

Recorded butterflies (Lepidoptera)

Golden Arab Tip *Colotis chrysonome*: frequently encountered at Foret du Day, with 1 copula seen. Identified by admin Pieter Vantiegheem through Observado.

Unidentified Blue *Anthena* sp: sev Foret du Day



Unidentified Blue *Anthena* sp & copula of Golden Arab Tip *Colotis chrysonome*, Foret du Day (RH, 29 Dec 2014)

Recorded hoverfly (Diptera)

Allograpta sp: c 3 Foret du Day



Hoverfly sp *Allograpta* sp, Foret du Day (WH, 29 Dec 2014)

Recorded fish

Whale Shark *Rhincodon typus*: 1 imm Tadjoura Gulf, west of Djibouti City

Blue Flutefish *Fistularia* sp: 3 at reef Tadjoura Gulf, west of Djibouti City

Recorded reptiles (all tentative ID's)

Middle Eastern Rock or Rock Semaphore Gecko *Pristurus flavipunctatus* / *rupestris*: 1 Foret du Day. This genus of small geckos is confined to Arabia and the Horn of Africa. Identified by Jan van der Winden from pix posted on Observado. The former is arboreal and the latter occurs on rocks mostly, so since this one was found on a tree it is most likely a Middle Eastern Rock Gecko

Pristurus flavipunctatus © V

Lanza's Spiny Agama *Agama spinosa*: 1 in a wadi just S of Djibouti City, 1 Foret du Day

Sinai Agama *Pseudotrapelus sinaitus*: 1 in a wadi just S of Djibouti City



Lanza's Spiny Agama *A. spinosa*, Djibouti City (RH, 26 Dec 2014) and Middle Eastern Rock Gecko *Pristurus flavipunctatus*, Foret du Day (RH, 29 Dec 2014)



Sinai Agama *Pseudotrapelus sinaitus*, just south of Djibouti City (WO, 26 Dec 2015)

Recorded fungi

Sandy Stiltball *Battarrea phalloides*: 2 Foret du Day. Apparently a rare species with a global distribution; this appears to be the first record for Djibouti. See pix posted on Observado and http://iucn.ekoo.se/iucn/species_view/159853 for more info. Identified by admin Wouter Teunissen through Observado.



Sandy Stiltball *Battarrea phalloides*, Foret du Day (RH, 29 Dec 2014)

Recorded plant

Caralluma acutangula: 1 (flowering), just south of Djibouti City



Caralluma acutangula, just south of Djibouti City (WH, 26 Dec 2015)



Close-up of flowering *Caralluma acutangula*, just south of Djibouti City (WO, 26 Dec 2015)

Of course we saw a number of other (unidentified, mostly flowering) plants at Foret du Day and southeast of Ali Sabieh, pictures of which I published on www.observado.org.

Interesting stones

Last but not least, we found a number of interesting quartzes and cristals. The most beautiful ones were bought at the deep canyon vantage point, geodes of a pinkish-purple amethyst-like gemstone. WH found a large geode SE of Ali Sabieh (which was too heavy to take home):



Videos and photographs

During this trip, I made some brief handheld videos with my Panasonic DMC-TZ35 (Lumix) pocket camera, which I will in due time upload onto either Surfbirds or YouTube. These include videos of (specialties in **bold**): **Persian Shearwater**, Western Reef Egret, Striated (Green-backed) Heron, Egyptian Vulture, **Crab Plover**, White-eyed & Sooty Gull, Nubian Woodpecker, Speckled Pigeon, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Hemprich's Hornbill, Black-crowned Sparrowlark, Crested Lark, 'long-billed' Desert Lark (ssp *nov?*), Rosy-patched Shrike, Fan-tailed Raven, **Somali Starling**, **Somali Bulbul**, **Arabian Golden Sparrow**, Somali x House sparrow hybrid, Rüppell's Weaver; and (Somali) Klipspringer, Speke's Pectinator, Pelzeln's and Soemmerring's Gazelle and Middle Eastern Rock Gecko *Pristurus flavipunctatus*.

Wesley will publish his photographs with his Observado sightings.

7 March 2015

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The team after having seen the Djibouti Francolin at Foret du Day. Left to right: Wesley Overman, Remco Hofland and Wil van den Hoven (30 Dec 2014)



Ethiopian Rock Hyrax *Procavia habessinica*, Foret du Day (WO, 29 Dec 2015)



Speke's Pectinator *Pectinator spekei*, along Day village access track (WO, 30 Dec 2014)



Pelzen's (Dorcas) Gazelles *Gazella (dorcus) pelzelni*, Petit Barra northwest of Ali Sabieh (WO, 31 Dec 2014)



Family of Soemmerring's Gazelle *Nanger soemmerringii*, Petit Barra desert NW of Ali Sabieh (WO, 1 Jan 2015)



Phillip's (Salt's) Dik-Dik *Madogella (saltiana) phillipsi*, southeast of Ali Sabieh (WO, 1 Jan 2015)



Adult Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Foret du Day (WO, 30 Dec 2014)



Dromedary, Petit Barra desert northwest of Ali Sabieh (WO, 1 Jan 2015)



Dromedaries, Petit Barra desert northwest of Ali Sabieh (WO, 1 Jan 2015)



Male Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*, Campement Touristique de Foret du Day (WO, 29 Dec 2014). I didn't know birds could do this! A genuine Epke Zonderland!