

# ETHIOPIA: 24 DECEMBER 2011– 2 JANUARY 2012

## CONTENTS

- Introduction
- Logistics
- Hotels & food
- Sites visited
- Itinerary
- Species list

## INTRODUCTION

Having had a very successful hardcore birding trip to Ethiopia in 1995/96 and keen to escape the British Christmas & New Year I decided that a return trip to Ethiopia would be a good way to end 2011 with a good chance of getting a few new mammals in the process. The fact that much of the mammal watching would be open country added to the appeal.

The trip proved a great success with 43 species, and surprisingly no fewer than 15 new mammals, albeit including five rodents and three recent ungulate splits.

Even more surprisingly we managed to see Aardwolf and three species of cats although the views of the latter could have been better.

Among the highlights Ethiopian Wolf, Gelada & Hamadryas Baboons and the rarely-seen Bale Monkey stood out.

## LOGISTICS

I decided to use Tony Hickey who had organised my previous birding trip. Tony runs Ethiopian Quadrants [www.ethiopianquadrants.com](http://www.ethiopianquadrants.com) a ground agent used by many international bird tour camps and cannot be recommended highly enough. He provided an excellent driver/guide Abiy Dagne, who worked incredibly hard working long hours most days. He is first and foremost a bird guide but is also very enthusiastic about mammals and best of all knew the Bale Monkey stakeout.

Another of the guides who works with Tony, Merid Gabremichael (co-author of the very useful **Where to Watch Birds in Ethiopia**) can show people Dibatag in the Southern Ogaden and with time and luck Somali Wild Ass north of Bilen.

Tony's quote was 30% higher than that of Elias but it was money well spent with a very comfortable 4WD and good hotels throughout.

## HOTELS & FOOD.

One unexpected bonus was the greatly improved quality and variety of food since the 1995 trip.

Addis Ababa (2 nights)	Ghion Hotel	A popular hotel with birders with a nice garden and good restaurant.
Awash NP (3 nights)	Awash Falls Lodge	Nice rooms, I was upgraded free of charge to a two-story cabin with views of the river and falls. Good food even if we didn't actually receive what we ordered a couple of times.

Bilen Plains (one night)	Bilen Lodge	Grossly overpriced but the only option in an excellent area and some recent visitors have had the added bonus of Lion as they've walked out of their cabin in the morning. <b>Note: This is the one place on our itinerary where malaria is a possibility. Mosquitoes can be very bad here after rains but fortunately we saw next to none.</b>
Lake Langano (one night)	Wabe Shabelle	Comfortable lakeside cabins. I didn't check out the restaurant.
Goba (3 nights)	Wabe Shabelle	£18 per night. The only option and far better than the accommodation at Dinsho. Good food.
Awassa (one night)	La Dolce Vita	Great rooms (£16 per night) and a fantastic restaurant with great Italian food. A great place to stay.

## SITES VISITED

Most of the sites visited are covered in Jon Hall's excellent report on the Ethiopia pages at [www.mammalwatching.com](http://www.mammalwatching.com) but the following updates the information provided by Jon. Page references relate to the relevant section of **Where to Watch Birds in Ethiopia** (Spottiswoode, Gabremichael & Francis).

### Debre Libanos (9-11)

- Geladas were easy along the road from the turn-off to the monastery, at least 300 being seen down to a few metres.
- The track below the Ethio-German hotel also provided more distant views of another troop.

### Debre Zeit (65-66)

### Awash NP (50-55)

- Not a mammal site but a good break on the journey to Awash and easy birding around the lakes here.
- Badly destroyed by grazing by livestock since my previous village and the only Beisa Oryx and Soemmering's Gazelle were restricted to the Ilala Sala Plains. We also saw African Wildcat here.
- The track from the park headquarters to the now disused Kereyou Lodge was quite productive early morning with a brief Caracal, Black-backed Jackal and the only good view of a male Northern Lesser Kudu.
- The Kudu Valley track to the north of the main road leads to Filowha Hotsprings where Hamadryas Baboon were easy to see early in the morning. The only Waterbuck was seen here and we saw Senegal Galago, African Wildcat & Black-backed Jackal while spotlighting here.
- Harar Dik-diik were common everywhere and small numbers of Northern Lesser Kudu were seen throughout although the area near the campsite was particularly productive.
- Grivet Monkeys were only seen near the lodge and campsite.
- Spotlighting was allowed as long as we took an armed guard and returned to the lodge by 8 pm. It was not particularly productive but we did see Crested Porcupine, African Wildcat and lots of Scrub Hares during about 5 hours spotlighting in total.

### Bilen Plains (57-61)

- Contrary to comments made by Jon Hall's driver this area is perfectly safe to visit and most bird tour companies do just that. An overpriced lodge but Common Warthog and Beisa Oryx occur near the lodge and Lion had been seen around the cabins on several occasions just prior to our visit and we heard Spotted Hyaena at night.
- Northern Gerenuk and Harar Dik-dik are easy to see along the approach road and Unstriped Ground Squirrel also occurs although we dipped.
- Spotlighting produced Golden Jackal, Northern Gerenuk and Scub Hare.

**Ali Dege Plains**  
(61-62)

- Lying a few kms north of the Bilen turn-off Ali Dege Plains are a gem with large numbers of Beisa Oryx, Soemering's Gazelle and Common Warthog with small numbers of Grevy's Zebra as well.
- We also saw Aardwolf here, Cheetah had been seen the week prior to our visit and a Naturetrek group reported Somali Wild Ass a few weeks prior to our visit. According to the rangers this was the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> record in recent years.
- The plains are open graasland which has been cleared of domestic livestock and the benefits are clear to see. Thjs is a great site for mammal watching and is only likely to get better.
- Driving north from the main access point Northern Gerenuk were common in roadside scrub as were Harar Dik-dik.
- Further north south of the town of Metaka we saw Hamadryas Baboon and Somali Wild Ass is supposed to be seeable in the rocky hills with time and local guides.

**Abiata-Shalla National Park**  
(74-76)

**Dinsho – park headquarters**  
(83-88)

- Only worth visiting to walk the grasslands close to the headquarters where Bright's Gazelle and Common Warthog are easy to see.
- Don't waste your time visiting the lake itself.
- Since Jon Hall's visit the road from Shashamene to Goba has largely been replaced, most of it is now asphalt and the remaining section should be completed within a few months.
- Rock Hyrax can be easily seen at the Cape Eagle Owl stakeout in Spottiswoode et al.
- Only worth a walk if you want close views of Menelick's Bushbuck which are common here along with Mountain Nyala. We also saw Bush Duiker and Common Warthog here.

**Dinsho – Gaysay Grasslands**  
(83-88)

- Don't waste your time visiting the museum.
- The best area at Dinsho the grasslands west of Dinsho, on both sides of the road are highly productive for Mountain Nyala, Bohor Reedbuck and Bush Duiker. We also saw Olive Baboon and Common Warthog.
- The most productive area is a side track running north from the main road by a small hut a few kms west of Dinsho itself. This track can be followed for several kms and gives great views over an area of grassland full of ungulates. **NB** the bridge a few kms from the road should be crossed with care as we got stuck for several hours when a wheel went through the bridge.
- The area is well-known for Serval and we had two distant views along the side track but others have had close views from the main road.
- We spotlighted here for a couple of hours and although we failed to find Serval did find 15 Spotted Hyaenas and had a Golden Jackal just west of Robe.

**Bale Mountains – Sanetti Plateau**  
(88-92)

- Ethiopian Wolf is easy, it's simply a case of covering the ground until you find them. We saw at least seven individuals.
- Ethiopian Klipspringer was easy from the road about a km prior to the first radio station (where Jon Hall saw them) and we also saw additional individuals a km closer to Goba and just as we started descending from the plateau down into Harrena Forest.
- Stark's Hare is widespread in small numbers but if you are struggling the area around the upper radio station is a good stakeout, we saw six here.
- Giant Mole Rat is easy to see as are the hundreds of rodents occupying the plateau, the main challenge is trying to distinguish the scarce Yellow-spotted Brush-furred Rat from the very common Black-clawed Brush-furred Rat, and the abundant Blick's Grass Mouse.

- Bale Mountains – Harrena Forest** (93-97)
- Harrena Forest contains a wide range of mammals and others have seen Lion, Wild Dog, Leopard, Giant Forest Hog and Bushpig here. Camping and spotlighting could therefore be productive.
  - The main draw is the elusive Bale Monkey but there is a reliable stakeout about 1.5 kms before you reach the campsite shown in Spottiswoode et al.
  - As you drop into the forest you go through a village. Shortly after this you start encountering bamboo which the monkeys prefer. We stopped a few hundred metres after encountering the first bamboo. We stopped on a short straight stretch of road shortly before the road takes a sharp right followed by a sharp left. The Bale Monkeys were on the left side of the road on the bend with a troop of Guerza Colobus. They were quite shy and disappeared into the bamboo when approached. Abiy and Merid both know the site well.
- Senkelle Sanctuary** (132-133)
- See directions in Spottiswoode et al.
  - Swayne’s Hartebeest & Sudan Oribi were both easy here. We also saw Common Warthog & Scrub Hare & Serval also occurs.
- Lake Awassa** (78-81)
- Gambian Sun Squirrel are relatively easy to find in the park next to the fish market. Grivet Monkey can also be seen here and in the town itself.
  - We also saw Hippo at Awassa after driving through a series of dirt tracks to get to a lakeside village but I have no idea of how to get there.
- Lake Ziway** (68)
- The Yellow-spotted Rock Hyrax seen by Jon Hall are no longer occupying the café. However if you leave the café and go back down the road for 100 yards or so there is a large tree set back about 75 yards from the road on the left of the road where the hyrax can easily be seen.

## ITINERARY

- 24<sup>th</sup>
- Early morning arrival in Addis & transferred to hotel.
  - Late morning visit to Debre Libanos for Gelada Baboon and back to Addis.
- 25<sup>th</sup>
- Morning visit to Debre Zeit and then on to Awash.
  - Late afternoon and early evening spotlighting Ilala Sala Plains
- 26<sup>th</sup>
- Early morning drive to Filowha Hotsprings, returning to lodge for lunch.
  - Late afternoon return to Kudu Valley, spotlighting back to lodge.
- 27<sup>th</sup>
- Early morning Ilala Sala Plains and then back to lodge via Kereyou Lodge track.
  - Late morning transfer to Bilen Lodge with short stop at Ali Dege Plains.
  - Late afternoon on Ali Dege Plains until dark & then spotlighting back to Bilen Lodge.
- 28<sup>th</sup>
- Early morning Ali Dege Plains followed by drive north to Metaka.
  - Long drive back to Lake Langano arriving early evening.
- 29<sup>th</sup>
- Early morning Abiata-Shalla National Park.
  - Long drive to Goba via Shashamene with long stop in Gaysay Grasslands although not fully recovered from heatstroke.
- 30<sup>th</sup>
- Morning on Sanetti Plateau, dropping down into Harrena Forest for a quick twitch for Bale Monkey.
  - Returned back to plateau for remainder of afternoon before returning to Goba for night.
- 31<sup>st</sup>
- Morning Sanetti Plateau returning to hotel for lunch.
  - Short walk behind Dinsho lodge mid-afternoon followed by late afternoon and evening in Gaysay Grasslands.
- 1<sup>st</sup>
- Not a particularly auspicious start to the new year, marooned for three and a half hours with a wheel stuck in a bridge. Eventually freed and headed back to Shashamene.
  - Late afternoon Senkelle Sanctuary and then headed to Awassa for night.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Early morning in park adjacent to Awassa fish market followed by a quick stop at a ‘Hippo stakeout’.
  - Late morning successfully tracking down Yellow-spotted Hyrax at Lake Ziway before returning to Addis ahead of evening flight home.

## SPECIES LIST

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 1  | <b>Scrub Hare</b> <i>Lepus saxitilia</i>                                   | Awash NP – a total of at least 13 individuals although only seen while spotlighting. Jon Hall suggested that the hares in Awash are Abyssinian, recently split from Cape, but my own view, and that of local guides, is that they are actually Scrub Hares. Three Bilen Plains, singles Ali Dege Plains & Senkelle Sanctuary. |
| 2  | <b>Stark's Hare</b> <i>Lepus starcki</i>                                   | Sanetti Plateau – Seven on day one and two on day two.  |
| 3  | <b>Gambian Sun Squirrel</b> <i>Heliosciurus gambianus</i>                  | Awassa – two in park by fish market   |
| 4  | <b>Crested Porcupine</b> <i>Hystrix cristata</i>                           | Awash NP – one close to park headquarters   |
| 5  | <b>Yellow-spotted Brush-furred Rat</b><br><i>Lophuromys flavopunctatus</i> | c.10 Sanetti Plateau  |
| 6  | <b>Black-clawed Brush-furred Rat</b><br><i>Lophuromys melanonyx</i>        | Common Sanetti Plateau  |
| 7  | <b>Blick's Grass Rat</b> <i>Arvicanthis blicki</i>                         | Abundant Sanetti Plateau  |
| 8  | <b>African Grass Rat</b> <i>Arvicanthis niloticus</i>                      | One Awash NP  |
| 9  | <b>Giant Mole-Rat</b> <i>Tachyoryctes macrocephalus</i>                    | Sanetti Plateau – eight on day one, two of day two  |
| 10 | <b>Spotted Hyaena</b> <i>Crocuta crocuta</i>                               | Heard Bilen Plains. A minimum of 15 at night in Gaysay Grasslands.  |
| 11 | <b>Aardwolf</b> <i>Proteles cristata</i>                                   | Ali Dege Plains – an unexpected bonus, one disturbed late afternoon unfortunately disappeared straight into its den, only to re-emerge an hour later as darkness fell.  |
| 12 | <b>African Wildcat</b> <i>Felis sylvestrus</i>                             | Awash NP – singles just after dark at Ilala Sala Plain and another just before dawn at the start of the track to Kudu Valley. Both seen poorly.   |
| 13 | <b>Caracal</b> <i>Felis caracal</i>  | One seen annoyingly briefly in Awash NP, crossing the track to Kereyou Lodge about an hour after dawn.  |
| 14 | <b>Serval</b> <i>Leptailurus serval</i>                                    | Seen shortly before dusk and again at 0900 the following morning in Gaysay Grasslands. Both views distant and frustratingly brief.  |
| 15 | <b>Golden Jackal</b> <i>Canis aureus</i>                                   | Two Bilen Plains, one west of Robe.   |
| 16 | <b>Black-backed Jackal</b> <i>Canis mesomelas</i>                          | Awash NP – two Kudu Valley, one along the track to Kereyou Lodge.   |
| 17 | <b>Ethiopian Wolf (Simien Fox)</b> <i>Canis simensis</i>                   | Sanetti Plateau – five on day one, four on day two including a group of three adults. At least seven individuals in total but unable to find the den with four cubs found by some Dutch birders during our stay.  |
| 18 | <b>Guereza Colobus</b> <i>Colobus guereza</i>                              | Four at Harrena Forest were the only colobus seen.  |
| 19 | <b>Senegal Galago</b> <i>Galago senegalensis</i>                           | One seen by Abiy in Kudu Valley in Awash NP   |
| 20 | <b>Gelada Baboon</b> <i>Theropithecus gelada</i>                           | Debre Libanos – fabulous animals. 300+ at close range along the road to the monastery. Another 100+ distantly from the path below the Ethio-German Hotel.   |
| 21 | <b>Olive Baboon</b> <i>Papio anubis</i>                                    | 40+ Awash NP, 30+ Gaysay Grasslands   |
| 22 | <b>Hamadryas Baboon</b> <i>Papio hamadryas</i>                             | 100+ at Filowha Springs in Awash NP. Another four near the bridge east of Awash town and three along the main road c.40 kms north of Bilen Plain.   |
| 23 | <b>Bale Monkey</b> <i>Cercopithecus djamdjamentis</i>                      | 6+ Harrena Forest. Great views of this shy and rarely seen primate. One of the highlights of the trip.  |
| 24 | <b>Grivet Monkey</b> <i>Cercopithecus aethiops</i>                         | Awash NP – two along the track to Awash Falls Lodge, another around the lodge itself, and 5+ around the campsite. One Bilen Plains. Awassa – four in the park by the fish market, another five in the town itself.  |

25	<b>Common Warthog</b> <i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	25+ Awash NP, 30+ Bilen Plains, 5 Ali Dege Plains, 3 Abiata-Shalla NP, common Gaysay Grasslands, 10+ Dinsho headquarters, one Senkelle Sanctuary & two south of Debre Zeit.
26	<b>Hippopotamus</b> <i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	One Lake Awassa
27	<b>Northern Gerenuk</b> <i>Litocranius sclateri</i>	Bilen Plains three on first day and at least four the following day. Ali Dege Plains – at least nine in scrub along main road including a group of five.
28	<b>Bright's Gazelle</b> <i>Gazella notatus</i>	14 Abiata-Shalla NP, split from Grant's Gazelle
29	<b>Soemmerring's Gazelle</b> <i>Gazella soemmerringii</i>	Six Awash NP (Ilala Sala Plains), 200+ Ali Dege Plains
30	<b>Harar Dik-dik</b> <i>Madoqua hararensis</i>	Awash NP – very common, at least 50. Bilen Plains 15+, Ali Dege Plains (mainly along the main road) 10+. Split from Salt's.
31	<b>Ethiopian Klipspringer</b> <i>Oreotragus saltatrixoides</i>	A recent split. Sanetti Plateau. Four on day one, one the second day.
32	<b>Sudan Oribi</b> <i>Ourebia montana</i>	Another dubious recent split. Six Senkelle Sanctuary.
33	<b>Waterbuck</b> <i>Tragelaphus ellipsiprymnus</i>	Awash NP, one Filowha Hotsprings
34	<b>Mountain Nyala</b> <i>Tragelaphus buxtoni</i>	50+ Gaysay Grasslands, 15+ Dinsho headquarters.
35	<b>Northern Lesser Kudu</b> <i>Tragelaphus imberbis</i>	16 Awah NP but only two males.
36	<b>Menelick's Bushbuck</b> <i>Tragelaphus menelicki</i>	Singles Gaysay Grasslands & Harrena Forest, 20+ Dinsho headquarters
37	<b>Bohor Reedbuck</b> <i>Redunca redunca</i>	150+ Gaysay Grasslands
38	<b>Beisa Oryx</b> <i>Oryx beisa</i>	c.60 Awash NP (Ilala Sala Plains), four Bilen Plains, common Ali Dege Plains.
39	<b>Swayne's Hartebeest</b> <i>Alcelaphus swaynei</i>	Six Senkelle Sanctuary. Another recent split.
40	<b>Bush Duiker</b> <i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>	One Dinsho headquarters, 20+ Gaysay Grasslands.
41	<b>Grevy's Zebra</b> <i>Equus grevyi</i>	Seven Ali Dege Plains
42	<b>Rock Hyrax</b> <i>Procavia capensis</i>	c.10 on roadside lava flows west of Lake Besaka, four at the Cape Eagle Owl site west of Dinsho & four Sanetti Plateau.
43	<b>Yellow-spotted Hyrax</b> <i>Heterohyrax brucei</i>	5+ Lake Ziway