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## **Ghana Birding Tour: 3 – 16 January 2020**

### **Summary**

The tour covered most of the southern parts of Ghana, as well as some of the central and north-central habitats. During the tour the temperature ranged from 09°C to 37°C. We recorded 24 mammal species, almost 400 species of birds and 9 species of reptiles. The species mentioned in the daily summaries are only some of those seen.

### **Daily Report**

#### **Day 1: Friday 3 Jan 2020 - Arrival in Accra**

We all arrived at Kotoka International Airport on the outskirts of the capital city of Ghana, Accra, on different flights. The Gold Coast of West Africa was clearly visible as we came in to land and one could see where the former name for Ghana came from. After clearing the efficient immigration system and picking up our luggage we made our way to our hotel near the town of Tema, situated to the east of Accra. We needed to freshen up from some long flights and enjoyed a good first meal and a good night's rest before our birding adventure of Ghana began.

#### **Day 2: Saturday 4 Jan 2020 - Shai Hills, Sakumono Lagoon**

Our morning began with the group meeting after arriving on different flights and enjoying breakfast together. We chatted about the day's plan, caught up on personal news (as most of the group know each other) and soon our birding adventure began with us making our way to Shai Hills.

The open grassland savannah of Shai Hills Reserve offers some great birding and a good introduction to birding in Ghana. We enjoyed a good walk and some of the birds seen included Brown Babbler, Northern Puffback, Grey-headed Bristlebill (offering top views), Senegal Parrot, Double-toothed Barbet, African Hobby, Rosy Bee-eater, Red-necked Buzzard and European Honey Buzzard. We however were still missing our main target for the area the White-crowned Cliff Chat. We made our way to another known area for the species and with a walk through the Boabab trees and rocks soon managed to get some great views of a pair of

White-crowned Cliff Chat - the birds showed well and it was a great sighting of this species that is best found at Shai Hills. We also had good views of Guinea Turaco, Bearded Barbet, African Thrush, Shikra and White-throated Bee-eater in this rocky area of the reserve.

We soon made our way back through the traffic around Tema heading for Sakumono Lagoon, a Ramsar site of importance for Ghana. We chatted away about the bird migration in the United States and how fascinating migration can be and also enjoyed some of Ghana's great fresh fruit on the way, easily bought at many stalls along the roads. Birds on the way included Purple Starling and Blue-bellied Roller among others.

After our driver expertly navigated the Saturday morning traffic we arrived at Sakumono Lagoon and we were treated to some exceptional birding. Some of the highlights included Spur-winged Lapwing, Western Yellow Wagtail (*flava* race) Royal Tern, Senegal Thick-knee, Western Marsh Harrier, Common Ringed and Grey Plover, hundreds of Collared Pratincole, Great Egret, Common Greenshank, Wood and Common Sandpipers; some really great trip birds before lunch.

After lunch we hit the road to continue the birding. We enjoyed some good conversation on the drive, chatting about our upcoming Madagascar trip and had a good laugh at the way goods are transported in Ghana and the amount of supplies sold next to the road - only in Africa! We popped into a local spot to try for Western Reef Heron as this would be a lifer for the group but also to try for Slender-billed Weaver, a target for the trip. We had luck with both species and had great views. We also had a nice sighting of our first mammal for the trip, a Common Cusimanse.

With the sun setting we made our way to our hotel for the night and on the way enjoyed roadside sightings of Hooded Vulture, Western Plantain-eater, Wilson's Indigobird and Common Kestrel. We arrived at our accommodation, settled in and freshened up before enjoying a wonderful meal at our lodge in the forest. We completed our lists and enjoyed a celebratory drink as it was one of the members of the group's birthday. What a great first day on our birding tour of Ghana!

### **Day 3: Sunday 5 Jan 2020 - Kakum National Park & Canopy walkway.**

Our morning began with an early breakfast so we could get to the famous canopy walkway at dawn to enjoy the birding when it's at its best. The Kakum National Park and its canopy walkway are world famous and being 350m long and 40m high is the longest in Africa. The reserve protects the special upper Guinea tropical rainforest and the upper Guinea endemic birds.

Our walk started off with us hearing the early morning chorus and some birds heard included Western Nicator and Rufous-sided Broadbill. As we reached the top of the rainforest on the canopy walkway the bird action began. Some of the top birds seen included Ussher's Flycatcher, Black-winged Oriole, Yellow-mantled Weaver, White-Crested Hornbill, the hard-

to-find Preuss's Weaver, Cassin's Honeybird, Speckled Tinkerbird, Forest Penduline Tit, Slender-billed Greenbul and the attractive Rufous-crowned Eremomela. As we moved between the platforms above the forest we had sightings of Violet-backed, Splendid and Chestnut-winged Starling, and we also enjoyed watching an African Harrier Hawk investigating nest holes on a tree and it was amazing to see how this special raptor can hang on the tree bark vertically and stick one foot into the holes. We also had a good laugh on the canopy walk as some members of the group don't do heights too well. All fun and games and everyone survived.

As we continued our morning so the birding just got better and we enjoyed a cracking sighting of a stunning Blue Cuckooshrike close to us soon followed by a Blue Malkoha – both new birds for the group members. Other great birds included Golden Greenbul, Superb Sunbird, Grey Longbill, Naked-faced, Hairy-breasted and Bristle-nosed Barbet, Violet-backed Hylia, Yellow-billed Turaco, Western Oriole, Green Hylia and Spotted Greenbul. We also enjoyed a great fly-over of Red-fronted Parrots - another big target for the group.



We moved on through the canopy and continued to enjoy some great birding in the forest. Some of the species we saw later in the afternoon included Grey-chinned Sunbird, African Cuckoo Hawk, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, White-breasted Nigrita offering stunning views, a beautiful Forest Wood Hoopoe, Lemon-bellied Crombec, Grey-headed Nigrita, Tit Hylia, Square-tailed and Fanti Saw-wing and Western Bearded Greenbul. After an excellent morning of birding we headed to our lodge for lunch and some down time before our afternoon trip back to Kakum and the canopy walk.

On the way to Kakum in the afternoon we enjoyed sightings of Vieillot's Black Weaver, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Bronze and Magpie Mannikin, Lizard Buzzard, Northern Fiscal and Village Weavers. Our afternoon in the rainforest was most enjoyable and we had some good

birding with highlights being Forest Robin, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Yellow-throated Tinkerbird and Chestnut-breasted Nigrita.

We all headed back to our accommodation after a very successful day on the canopy walkway and freshened up before dinner. Dinner was enjoyable and we chatted away about how great the birding in the African forests is and all hit the sack for a good sleep as tomorrow is another early start.

#### **Day 4: Monday 6 Jan 2020 - Kakum National Park - Antikwaa**

Our morning started before sunrise as we aimed to be near the park boundary close to Antwikwaa for sunrise to enjoy the birding while it's cool and at its best, and we also wanted to try for White-spotted Flufftail - a major target for the trip.

Lady luck was on our side and soon we could hear the Flufftail calling, and with some patience we obtained some exceptional views on this real sulker. The group was over the moon and this made for a great start to the day with some of the group commenting that *this* is the reason for an early start on a birding trip. We also enjoyed a great sighting of Lowland Sooty Bulbul and as if things could not improve a Red-chested Goshawk flew in and posed wonderfully for pictures.

We made our way further along the forest and took a walk along a forest track on the outskirts of Kakum National Park Here our birding continued and some of the highlights included Buff-spotted Woodpecker, Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher, Yellow-browed Camaroptera, Crested Malimbe, Green Crombec, Sabine's Spinetail, Cassin's Spinetail and Fraser's Forest Flycatcher. We all enjoyed a slight break and a snack before continuing. We had a good laugh about the different birding stories the group had and soon continued into the forest. We targeted some birds we had missed before moving onto the Pra (aka Praso) River to try for the special White-bibbed Swallow. We enjoyed good views of Black-and-white Mannikin, Red-breasted Swallow, Black Bee-eater, Swamp Palm Bulbul, Johanna's Sunbird and Dusky-blue Flycatcher.

We continued towards the Pra (Praso) River and chatted away about our great morning and birds seen. A quick stop at the swallow colony yielded us with good views on the Preuss's Cliff Swallows feeding along the river. This was a special bird for one of our participants as it was her 1500<sup>th</sup> bird seen so it's was a celebratory bird. We had some good roadside birding with us seeing Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Red-necked Buzzard, Black-winged Red Bishop and Senegal Coucal.

We arrived at the river and soon had great views of the White-bibbed Swallows - it was a good sighting to see the adults feeding 3 youngsters in a nest; we also enjoyed good views of Rock Practincoles. After a successful morning we made our way back to our accommodation for lunch (that included some excellent pizzas) and a short break before our afternoon trip to the Abrafo Forest on the Western edge of Kakum.

Our afternoon trip was very rewarding and we enjoyed sightings of Rufous-sided Broadbill, Icterine Greenbul, Sabine's Puffback, Blue-throated Roller and Little Green Woodpecker. The Abrafo Forest is spectacular so spending time in the forest is very rewarding; as we came out the forest at dusk we could hear Ahanta Francolin calling but could not locate the bird. We drove to a spot to try for some owls namely Fraser's Eagle Owl and on the way enjoyed sightings of Plain Nightjar. After some searching at night we could hear Fraser's Eagle Owl calling and soon had a brilliant sighting of the this stunning bird, and as a bonus as we made our way back to the vehicle we heard a Black-winged Nightjar and managed to get some superb views on a bird perched - what a great way to end a fantastic day of birding!

We freshened up back at our lodge and enjoyed another wonderful meal. We chatted about everyone's favorite bird for the day and completed our lists before getting a good night's rest. It's always interesting learn and hear about people's birding trips and the great birds seen by the group on different tours. By this time the trip list was well over 120 species.

## **Day 5: Tuesday 7 Jan 2020. Kakum National Park, Abrafo & Nsuta Forest.**

Our morning started slightly later as we were going to do some local birding around Abrafo Forest. Breakfast was enjoyed and soon we were back to the birding and targeting some the species we still need. The birding got off to a great start and some of the birds seen included Rosy Bee-eater, Red-cheeked Wattle-eye, Black-bellied Seedcracker and Lanner Falcon. A highlight for all was a close fly-by of a calling Thick-billed Cuckoo. The bird then surprised us further by perching on a distant tree to continue its calling – a special treat.

Heading into the forest, highlights included Copper-tailed Starling, Honeyguide Greenbul, Lemon-bellied Crombec, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, Palm-nut Vulture, Red-billed Helmetshrike, Blue-billed Malimbe, Shining Drongo, Fraser's Sunbird, Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher and Buff-throated Sunbird. As we stopped to enjoy a break and some snacks we had a good laugh at one our guides jumping around avoiding the formidable forest army ants!

We proceeded with our walk out the forest and had some luck and managed to get a great view of Red-fronted Antpecker - a difficult species to locate. Just as things could not get any better we heard a Chocolate-backed Kingfisher calling and soon managed to get good views on the bird perched - what an exciting 20 minutes of birding. We made our way back to our accommodation for lunch and then made our way along the Gold Coast towards the famous Cape Coast with its historically significant castles.

We checked into our new accommodation in the town of Shama and left in the later afternoon for birding in a new area. Our afternoon birding in the new habitat of Nsuta Forest was rewarding and we enjoyed sighting of Black Bee-eater, Piping Hornbill, Buff-throated Sunbird and managed to get great views on Akun Eagle-Owl as it got dark - another great trip bird. Unfortunately we only managed to hear the Spot-breasted Ibis as they came into roost.

After another exciting day we made our way back to our accommodation for dinner and to complete our lists. We chatted about the next day's plan and enjoyed watching some of the Premier League soccer on the go - we had a group of soccer fans! We hit the sack for a good night's rest as tomorrow we would move onto Nsuta Forest again and Ankasa Reserve which offers some great birds.

## **Day 6: Wednesday 8 Jan 2020. Nsuta Forest and Ankasa Reserve**

As per the norm on birding trips we had an early breakfast in order for us to get to the Nsuta Forest to get some of the birds we still needed. Just as we started breakfast our local guide Paul called us to view a Long-tailed Nightjar in the parking lot of the hotel - always good starting the day with a lifer for the group!

We headed for the semi-deciduous forest of Nsuta and enjoyed a good morning of birding, some of the highlights included Sharpe's Apalis, Ansorge's Greenbul, White-headed Wood Hoopoe, male and female perching African Emerald Cuckoos, Yellow-billed Barbet, Maxwell's Black Weaver and Brown-cheeked Hornbill. We also got treated to a stunning fly over and superb views of Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill - this is a special bird to see and was a target for the trip, even better that it showed so well.

We made our way back to our accommodation for lunch and packed up and made our way west towards our next major destination for the trip, Ankasa Reserve. Ankasa Reserve is Ghana's only wet evergreen rainforest and is in pristine condition; this making it a major highlight for the trip. Ankasa is home to an assortment of rare and sought after avian and mammal gems. On the way we made a stop at a few wetland ponds outside the town of Takoradi and enjoyed sightings of African Pygmy Goose, Allen's Gallinule, African Jacana, Common and Lesser Moorhen, Red-necked Buzzard and Orange Weaver - a good birding stop and leg stretch.

As we made our way towards Ankasa we chatted about the birds expected in the next few days and did a list check and made sure of the species we have seen thus far, some of the group used the time to catch up on some sleep.

A strategic stop was made along the mangrove wetlands along the Ebi River to target two special sunbirds for the trip. Luck was on our side and we had great views on Mangrove and Reinchenbach's Sunbird and we also enjoyed top views on a pair of Hartlaub's Ducks - another great birding stop.

We arrived at our wonderful campsite in at Ankasa in the late afternoon and settled in before our evening birding walk. Our walk was rewarding and we enjoyed views of Cassin's Flycatcher, great photo opportunities of a Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher and brief views of an African Finfoot.

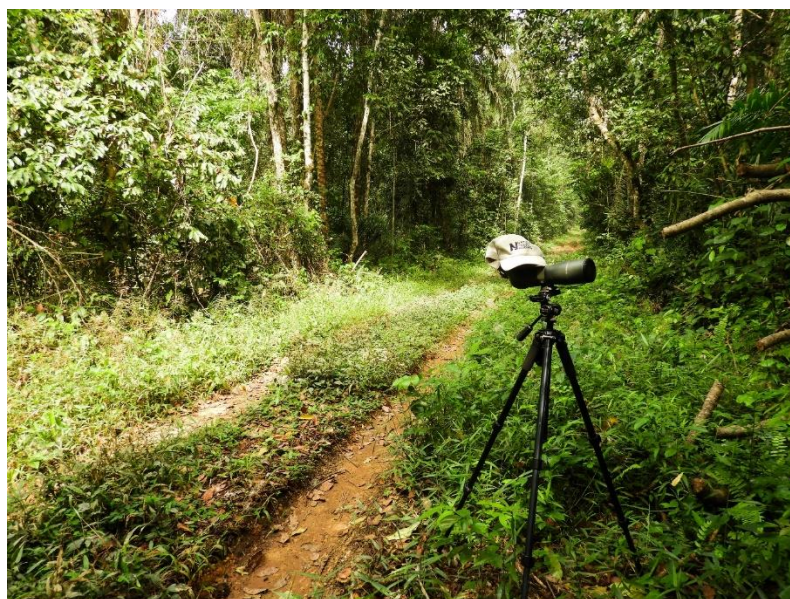
We enjoyed a few refreshing drinks and as we settled in to complete our lists all hell broke loose! Our local guides Jackson and Paul came running to tell us they had found a Nkulengu Rail - undoubtedly one of Africa's top birds to see. We were extremely fortunate to get some incredible views of not just one, but a pair of Nkulengu Rails perched above us in the trees! It was indeed a magical few minutes for everyone on the group and even the guides remarked that this was a special sighting even for them.

Just as we thought we were done for the night Jackson came running and said Paul had found a White-bellied Kingfisher perched along the river close to our campsite! After a short walk we were rewarded with great views of this stunning kingfisher. What a wonderful introduction for us at Ankasa!

After all the excitement we finished our lists, adding the two special birds we had seen, and all enjoyed a wonderful meal before hitting the sack for a good night's rest. As we headed off we had great views on the camp's resident African Wood Owl and all fell asleep to the sounds of the forest around us.

## **Day 7: Thursday 9 Jan 2020 Ankasa Reserve**

We started nice and early with breakfast so we could head into Ankasa and enjoy the special birds the forest has to offer. Birding started with us getting superb views on a Congo Serpent Eagle flying over the forest clearing - what a top bird and high on the group's wish list. Some of the other highlights for the morning included Brown-eared Woodpecker, Red-vented Malimbe (this completing the malimbés for the trip), Tiny Sunbird, and a stunning Blue-headed Wood Dove and just before lunch we enjoyed top views of a Lagden's Bushshrike. We enjoyed a wonderful lunch at an old abandoned camp in the forest and took a slight break before heading back to try and target some of skulking species in the forest.



Our afternoon was slow with it being warm and humid but with perseverance and patience we were rewarded with sightings of Black Spinetail, Yellow-Bearded Greenbul, Yellow-throated Tinkerbird, Grey Parrot and Great Blue Turaco. The shy illadopsis, bristlebills and alethes just would not show, but we were confident we would get them tomorrow. With it getting dark we tried one of the forest ponds to see if we could get lucky with Spot-breasted Ibis coming in to roost but unfortunately we lucked out. We did have a good sighting of Dwarf Crocodile that was enjoyed by all.

We made our way back to our camp site knowing our local chef would have prepared a tasty meal for the group. We enjoyed another good dinner, completed our lists and chatted away about the day we enjoyed in this special forest. We all headed off to bed quite early as we knew tomorrow would be another early start. Falling asleep to the silence and night sounds of the forest ensured we all enjoyed a good night's rest.

### **Day 8: Friday 10 Jan 2020. Ankasa Reserve and back to Yukwa.**

Our morning once again began at sunrise with a quick coffee and snack before heading into forest for our final walk at Ankasa. This morning we decided to target some of the skulking special species we had missed. Our morning got off to a great start when we accidentally crossed paths with a huge ant colony on the move. The birds soon got in on the act and we were treated with good views of Pale-breasted Illadopsis, Finsch's Rufous Thrush, Red-tailed Bristlebill, White-tailed Alethe, Western Bearded Greenbul and White-tailed Ant Thrush - what a top morning of birding.

We made our way back to camp to enjoy breakfast and pack up to head back east. We did some back tracking to Kakum and the Abrafo Forest as this is on the route to the Rockfowl (Picathartes) site.

A slight detour on the way yielded us with great views of Carmelite Sunbird - a lifer and target for the whole group, this was also the 1000<sup>th</sup> bird a couple on the trip had seen in Africa so a good milestone bird! As we drove we chatted about how we enjoyed being in the forest and how well organized the camping team was. Lunch was enjoyed en route as we made our way to our accommodation.

We arrived at our accommodation in the town of Yukwa in time to settle in and enjoy a slight break before dinner. Some of the group opted to go for a run with us as part of being active on our trips, an innovative initiative of our sister company Nature Travel Active.

We all met for another good meal and completed our lists from another day of great birding in Ghana. Our trip list has shot up to over 250 species by this stage. We chatted away about our upcoming birding trips and had a good laugh at some of antics going on in the Ghanaian news. A good night's rest was enjoyed by all.



## Day 9: Saturday 11 Jan 2020 - Abrafo forest and Rockfowl nesting site.

We met for our breakfast at our accommodation and headed out to the outskirts of the Abrafo forest to target some of species we were missing for the area. We enjoyed a hot and humid walk with some good birding. A very cooperative Puvél's Illadopsis got the morning off to a good start and other good birds included Red-cheeked Wattle-eye, better views on Northern Puffback, the first Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird for the trip, Blue-headed Coucal, Western Bluebill, Copper and Green-headed Sunbird, Marsh Tchagra and the stunning Vieillot's Barbet. As we made our way out the forest patch we got treated to great views of Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat - a difficult bird in West Africa and a good find.

We made our way north towards the Ashanti region of Ghana and towards the remote village close to the Rockfowl nesting site. We enjoyed lunch en route and had roadside sightings of Common Kestrel, Hooded Vulture and Lanner Falcon.

We arrived at the village close to the Rockfowl site all excited. The village is very proud of the Rockfowls and are actively involved in protecting the forest and the birds - it's so great to see ecotourism working so well.



We made our way up to the nesting site of the Picathartes and settled in to wait for the birds. Our patience was rewarded and after about an hour's wait we had a single Picathartes make an appearance and offer some fantastic views. We got a real show and had the bird walking and sitting right in front of us - what an incredible bird and sighting. Seeing the White-necked Rockfowl (Picathartes) so close was a highlight of the trip and one of my top birding highlights in Africa. It even bought a tear to the eye for some of the group.

With the group all very happy and thrilled we made our way down the hill for the celebratory high fives and fist pumps. We also enjoyed some good birding on our walk in and out of the

Nyamebe Bepo Forest reserve with top birds being Melancholy Woodpecker, Black Spinetail, Blue Cuckooshrike and African Harrier Hawk. We unfortunately could only hear Afep Pigeon calling despite our efforts to try and coax one in.

We all settled in for a long drive to our accommodation further north on the outskirts of the city of Kumasi, and closer to Mole National Park. The drive was uneventful and we all caught up on some sleep, completed lists and chatted about birding and the hobby we love so much.

We arrived at our accommodation, settled in and enjoyed dinner while completing our lists for the day and enjoying a cold beer to celebrate the amazing views we had on the Picathartes. We soon headed for bed as with all birding trips tomorrow would be another early start.

## **Day 10: Sunday 12 Jan 2020. Offinso Forest and Mole National Park**

Well rested and after a good night's sleep we all enjoyed breakfast before hitting the road for Mole National Park. On the way we made a stop at Offinso Forest (also called the Apro River forest) to try and target some of the forest species we still needed. We enjoyed a lovely stroll and got some good birds, with highlights being Variable Sunbird, Splendid Sunbird, Double-toothed Barbet, a beautiful Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, scope views of Lizard Buzzard, stunning Blue-bellied Roller, great views on Guinea Turaco, a very vocal Red-winged Warbler and a Singing Cisticola.

We continued north heading for Mole and enjoyed a welcome break and lunch en route and chatted about some of the targets and what we hope to see up at Mole. Some good roadside birding was done and we got views on Grasshopper Buzzard, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Hooded Vulture and Shikra.

We arrived at our accommodation in Mole National Park in the later afternoon and settled in to our rooms overlooking the camp's waterhole.

We enjoyed some good early evening birding around the camp with highlights being Pygmy Sunbird, Senegal Eremomela, Senegal Batis, Lavender Waxbill, African Grey Woodpecker, Senegal Parrot, Lavender Waxbill, the stunning Violet Turaco and European Pied Flycatcher.

We also enjoyed sightings of Kob, Bushbuck and a troop of Olive Baboons. Some of the group enjoyed a swim before dinner. We enjoyed dinner in the peace and quiet of the park and completed our lists as we chatted about the next day's plans and the exciting birding that awaited us. We all headed off to bed to get a good night's rest, and just before retiring had a good sighting of the camp's resident Greyish Eagle-Owl.



### **Day 11: Monday 13 Jan 2020. Mole National Park.**

Our morning started with us enjoying sunrise over the park as we had breakfast. We headed out to explore Mole and target the savannah species calling the park home. We enjoyed another great morning of birding with highlights being Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Swamp Flycatcher, Togo Paradise Whydah, gorgeous Beautiful Sunbird, Bearded Barbet, White-shouldered Black Tit, African Blue Flycatcher, White-backed and Hooded Vulture, Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike, White-crowned Robin-Chat, Blackcap Babbler, Rufous Cisticola, Black Scimitarbill, Fine-spotted Woodpecker, Black-faced Firefinch, Lesser Honeyguide and Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat.



A firm favorite for the morning was having a Shining-blue Kingfisher land right next to us, this followed by an Abyssinian Roller perched above the kingfisher - two gorgeous birds in one sighting! We also enjoyed sightings of Kob, Striped Ground Squirrel, Olive Baboon, Patas Monkey, Common Warthog and as we arrived back at camp a small group of African Elephants were mud bathing at the waterhole - a great end to the morning.

After enjoying another good lunch some of the group had a dip in the clear cool water of the camp's swimming pool and then everyone enjoyed a short siesta in the heat of the day.

In the mid-afternoon we headed out into the park again. This time we were aiming further north towards the sparsely vegetated and burnt areas of the park. Our birding was mostly done from the air-conditioned comfort of the bus, as even short walks outside resulted in an epic battle with the tsetse flies! We still managed some good species though, and highlights were White-fronted Black Chat, African Spotted Creeper (always a cool bird wherever you see it), Sun Lark, beautiful Four-banded Sandgrouse and Stone Partridge. Two special mammals during our afternoon session were a small family herd of Roan Antelope and a lone Red-flanked Duiker.

As the light started fading we ventured further into the park in search of another special trip bird, and found a group of four very obliging Forbes's Plovers! Result! This was not to be the only highlight of the afternoon/evening, as just after dark we found a stunning Standard-winged Nightjar in the road. It was special seeing this amazing nightjar so close, and it turned out to be very relaxed, giving us great views and decent photo opportunities. This bird is anything but standard (the name comes from the long, flag-like wing ornament of the bird), and would turn out to easily make it into everyone's Top 10 list of birds for the trip.

Nocturnal mammals on our night drive included Northern Lesser Galago, African Savanna Hare, Common Genet and West African Large-spotted Genet.

We returned to camp happy and hungry, and had another good meal while we did our lists and enjoyed the excellent local beer. Our trip list was well on the way to 350 species by now! We all settled in and had a good night's rest after another awesome day in Ghana.

## **Day 12: Tuesday 14 Jan 2020. Mole National Park.**

Our day started again with an early breakfast in camp, after which we set off for the area around the abandoned airstrip. This habitat consisted of savannah and old cultivated lands. Here we had some great sightings, including Dorst's Cisticola, White-crested Helmetshrike and Greater Honeyguide. The highlight was hearing some White-throated Francolin calling and then patiently waiting for them... We were rewarded by a pair of these beautiful gamebirds appearing out of the bushes and then crossing a path in front of us. We even managed some decent photographs!

Next we headed for a densely wooded area around some ponds and waterways, in search of species we may have missed yesterday and of course some extra ones. Birds seen on our walk here included Red-winged Pytilia, the beautiful Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Bar-breasted Firefinch and another trip highlight, an Oriole Warbler that we watched for about 15 minutes! A special treat indeed.

We returned to the camp for lunch and directly afterwards we left the park on an excursion northwards... We were hoping to connect with one of Africa's top birds, the Egyptian Plover.

We made our way to the White Volta river and on the way managed to spot some good raptors, the highlight being a first-for-the-trip Beudoin's Snake Eagle.

We reached the river in the mid afternoon and started searching for the plover. It is also called the "crocodile bird" for its alleged symbiotic relationship with crocodiles, although this has never been photographically proven. It is special because it is now regarded as the sole member of its own monotypic family Pluvianidae. After about half an hour of searching we managed to get views of a very distant bird that could have been the plover, but we decided to walk along the banks of the river to get better views. We were rewarded when about halfway to the bird it suddenly flew up and landed near us on some rocks. The excitement in the group was palpable – an Egyptian Plover! We managed some great photos and videos, and the views through the guide's scope was incredible. A really special bird.

After this excitement we slowly walked back to the bus, chatting about our fantastic plover experience, and picked up White-rumped Seedeater along the way, a new trip bird. We drove back to Mole and upon arrival decided to once more search the open areas around the airstrip for nocturnal birds. We managed great views of a Long-tailed Nightjar, but could not coax a calling Northern White-faced Owl towards us.

We returned to camp after another fantastic birding day, made our lists, had dinner and enjoyed a good night's sleep.



### **Day 13: Wednesday 15 Jan 2020. Mole to Offinso Forest. Kumasi.**

We started our final morning in Mole with another early breakfast and a quick scan on the way out of the park for Brown-backed Woodpecker. We had missed it the day before and were very happy when we got excellent views of this beautiful species.

We then left Mole and headed south for our long drive back to the city of Kumasi. Everyone agreed that Mole, although not as game-rich as parks in the rest of the continent, is a must-visit destination in Ghana.

We enjoyed lunch en route and also added a Grey Kestrel to our trip list. At midday we stopped again at the Offinso (Apro River) Forest where we had birded on the day we travelled up to Mole.

We spent the entire afternoon in the forest searching for species we still needed from this area, and despite the heat and humidity we managed some great birds during our walk. These included the beautiful Fiery-breasted Bushshrike, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, African Hobby, Western Nicator and a nice surprise, an African Broadbill. We also heard Forest Scrub Robin and Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, but despite much searching we just couldn't get eyes on either of these two forest specials.

After our walk we headed back to the cool interior of our bus and our driver took us to our hotel in Kumasi. The traffic of this, Ghana's second biggest city, is hectic, but witnessing the incredible vibrancy of the people made up for the slow progress.

At our hotel we had another good dinner and completed our lists. We all had a good night's rest after a hard afternoon in the forest.

### **Day 14: Thursday 16 Jan 2020. Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary.**

After another early breakfast we left the city of Kumasi and made our way southeast to our next birding hotspot, Bobiri.

We arrived at the Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary early in the morning and were excited at the prospect of new habitat and species! Bobiri is a small (55 km<sup>2</sup>) forest sanctuary that is renowned for its diversity and abundance of butterflies; over 400 species have been identified here. It is the only dedicated butterfly sanctuary in west Africa. It is also home to over 100 species of native trees, some of them over 300 years old. And the birding was not too bad either! We walked in the reserve for about 4 hours and managed some fantastic species, including a pair of African Piculet (an undoubted trip highlight), skulking Latham's Francolin, Black-throated Coucal, stunning Black Dwarf Hornbill and Congo Serpent Eagle with, as its name would suggest, a snake in its formidable talons. A superb morning for everyone!



We then made our way towards the town of Old Tafo. We had lunch at a roadside restaurant and then headed for our accommodation. On the way there we got to see something truly incredible, namely thousands of African Straw-coloured Fruit-bats flying above a small patch of trees; truly remarkable to see these huge bats darken the skies with their sheer size and numbers.

We arrived at our comfortable accommodation in the mid afternoon and some of the group went for a jog again, as part of our policy of keeping everyone healthy and active on a trip. We got together for lists and dinner and chatted about the last day of the trip that lay ahead. Everyone was excited at the prospect of one last push for more species on this amazing trip.

### **Day 15: Friday 17 Jan 2020. Birding Atewa Range and Departure.**

We got together for an early last breakfast together and left for the Atewa Range Forest Reserve. It is one of the only higher lying areas in Ghana, a critically endangered highland upper Guinea rainforest and a reserve that protects many quality and rare species.

We arrived at the base of the reserve in misty conditions, which was a good thing because we couldn't see the top of the climb we were heading up! It is quite a relentless pull to get to the top of the ridge, but the birding along the forest paths more than makes up for the physical exertion. We ticked several of our target birds during the course of the morning, including the stunning Blue-moustached Bee-eater (that posed for great photos) and Long-tailed Hawk (that had eluded us until now). We also had beautiful views of a Yellow-throated Cuckoo, a soaring Crowned Eagle, Black-capped Apalis, Tessmann's Flycatcher and a Western Bronze-naped Pigeon. We also had great views of many other great birds we had seen earlier in the trip, including Levillant's Cuckoo, Blue Malkoha, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Cassin's Honeybird, Blue-throated Brown Sunbird and many others. We also got some fantastic photographs of some of Ghana's beautiful butterflies; although we didn't know most of their names they were still incredible to see. We all agreed that despite the hard walking Atewa had been another highlight of the trip.

We returned to the lodge early in the afternoon for a quick shower and checked out. We then headed for Accra and a hotel on the outskirts of this bustling city. The drive there just again highlighted how good our driver was on this trip.

We arrived at our hotel and enjoy a final dinner together. We chatted about our top birds of the trip and most people agreed that the trio of Egyptian Plover, White-necked Rockfowl and Nkulengu Rail were the winners. We also remarked on how the country of Ghana surprised us all. It far exceed our expectations. The people were incredibly friendly, the food was great, the accommodation was of a good standard, and the country itself was far more beautiful and safer than we thought it would be. A great trip was had by all!