

'Bird watching in Ethiopia' – Jeff Blincow (Thursday 16th January 2014)

Jeff travelled to Ethiopia in 2012 for a three week trip to try and see all of the endemic birds and as many of the mammals as possible. The improved infrastructure in Ethiopia has made it possible to cover the same ground that would have taken six weeks to cover just a few years earlier.

Ethiopia has a very diverse terrain which is different to the perception of Ethiopia as being a dry, flat, arid country from our memories of the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s. Diagonally a river runs through Ethiopia and there are a number of lakes running along the route of the river – this area is the Rift Valley. There is a mountainous area called the Bale Mountains to the north which can get very cold, as well as there being plains to the south. There are a number species of birds which are only found in Ethiopia and some which are only found in one part of Ethiopia. For example, the Liban Lark is only found in the Ethiopian plains and there are now only 250 larks remaining. Jeff recorded a huge number of species during his trip and took some wonderful photographs – ranging from plain looking to incredibly colourful birds. Here are some examples of the species recorded in the different areas:

In the Bale Mountains and Ethiopian Highlands, he saw the Abyssinian Thrush, the Blue Winged Goose, the Abyssinian Long Claw, the Spot Breasted Lapwing, the Ethiopian Siskin and the African Paradise Flycatcher. In the river area, he recorded Red Billed Patillia, Rupell's Robincat, the Three Banded Plover, as well as a number of dragonfly. In the Rift Valley, Jeff saw the Red Throated Pipit, Pied Wheatear, Blue Breasted Bee Eater and the White Throated Robin and near the town of Awash, the Sombre Rockchat, Greyish Eagle Owl and Somalia Fiscal Shrike. In the grasslands, species such as Gillett's Lark, Kori Bustard and the Cut Throat Weaver were observed. Around Abbis Abbaba, the Maribou Stork, the Wood Sandpiper and Silvery Cheeked Hornbill were seen and in the south, he saw such species as the Abyssinian Scimitar Bill, which eats ants in the acacia trees. Finally, in the lakes area, he photographed the African Pygmy Goose, Sunbird and Malachite Kingfisher.

Jeff recommended Ethiopia as a great country to visit for birdwatchers due to its diverse terrain, its vastly improved road network and the fact that it has a number of rare and endemic species.